 Characterisation in Hag-Seed: Miranda

| Section of the Text: | Literal(A quote or example from the text) | Figurative(How does the composer convey meaning?) | Thematic(What impact does this have upon the theme(s) of the play?) | Conceptual(How does this relate to the world beyond the text?) |
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| Beginning‘Hag-Seed’/ ‘Tempest’ as close study | “So he was on his own with his newborn daughter, Miranda… He’d been entranced with her from the start…But then… Meningitis… But nothing worked, and then she was gone…It was like an enormous black cloud boiling up over the horizon… No: it was like nothing he could put into language”- Pages 14-15 | The loss of Miranda, Prospero’s daughter, is recounted in less than a page, reflecting the suddenness of the loss itself and the fragility of all lifeFelix’s attempt to describe the loss highlights how the third-person narration is focalised through his perspective. His inner monologue rejects his “black cloud” simile, citing the failure of language to convey the magnitude of his loss | At this stage in the narrative, the recounted loss of Miranda serves only to characterise Felix as a father, as very much human, and as imprisoned in many ways by his grief | Universal experience of human tragedy and lossThe loss also characterises Felix in an interesting way, as he is staging Shakespeare’s The Tempest as a form of redemption/rebirth/healing. The human experience of catharsis through art and performance is therefore conveyed through his character and his relationship to the world |
| Middle‘Hag-Seed’/ ‘Tempest’ as close study | “…she’s over by their table, in the gathering shadows…She insists on being in the production. Worse, she wants to play Miranda”Page 166-8“Miranda’s made a decision: she’ll be understudying Ariel…He’d like to give her a hug, but that’s not possible. Prospero and Ariel never touch: how can you touch a spirit?”Page 180 | Miranda frequently lurks in shadow, reflecting her ephemeralityThrough Felix’s focalised inner monologue, Miranda gains a voiceIntertextualityAtwood directly quotes from ‘The Tempest’ on this page as Miranda whispers Ariel’s dialogue into Felix’s ear, mimicking Ariel’s spritely magicSymbolism in the fact that Miranda casts herself as Ariel’s understudy at the moment where Felix begins rehearsing as ProsperoIntentional ambiguity in Atwood’s intertextual conflation of Miranda and Ariel | Miranda’s presence as speechless spirit, seen and heard only by Felix, reinforces the power of grief to create multiple realities, and to imprison the mind while paradoxically creating human connectionsMiranda’s conflation with the character of Ariel could carry many meanings | Miranda’s presence in the narrative is a distinct point of difference from Shakespeare’s ‘The Tempest, and introduces the universal nature of grief to the story in a novel wayThe ambiguity of Miranda’s presence and meaning in the novel serves to further reinforce the power of the reader’s interpretation to breathe new life into stories, and to ‘colour’ textual conversations in a myriad of ways |
| End‘Hag-Seed’/ ‘Tempest’ as close study | “[Anne-Marie] can go to town on it, raise the roof, and he has no doubt that she will…His life has had this one good result”Page 280-1“The endgame of his obsession wasn’t to bring his Miranda back to life…What has he been thinking – keeping her tethered to him all this time?“To the elements be free,” he says to her.And, finally, she is”Page 283 | Anne-Marie can very much be viewed as an intertextual transformation of Shakespeare’s Miranda. Here, as in much of the novel, Anne-Marie is characterised through Felix’s focalised perspective as a daughter-like figure. His tone is filled with a fatherly confidence, and the narrator’s hyperbole in describing Anne-Marie and Freddie’s match as his life’s greatest legacy, is reminiscent of Prospero’s coupling of Miranda and Ferdinand in Shakespeare’s playAnagnorisis (the hero’s moment of realisation)Intertextual allusion | Anne-Marie is, in many ways, the living appropriation of Shakespeare’s Miranda that Atwood conjures. Her character reflects the power of Atwood as the modern storyteller, but also offers up a dissonance that causes Atwood’s story to diverge with a complex purpose from Shakespeare’s originalFelix’s anagnorisis comes in the form of his realisation about the selfishness of his grief, and the fact that his entire performance – the play-within-the-novel – has been more about healing and freedom than revengeAt the end of ‘The Tempest’, Prospero describes the loss of his daughter given her love with Ferdinand. Here, we realise with a sense of finality that Atwood has manifested this loss as the impetus for her story | Ultimately, Atwood’s Felix becomes as much a representation of Shakespeare as he does Prospero, if not more so given that he is an artist before anything else, and arguably much more three-dimensional than Prospero. Alongside ‘The Tempest’, Miranda and Felix’s freedom at the end of the novel becomes an existential reflection of the human experience of loss and letting go. As readers, we appreciate the way in which Atwood has told the same story as Shakespeare did, and so many others have and will do, in a way that resonates in new yet continuous ways. Unlike Miranda in the novel, the story is the only thing that remains constant, trapped by our human perspectives through time |