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The Tempest Behind Bars: Art as Revenge in Margaret Atwood's Novel *Hag-Seed*

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To my parents

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Abstract

This MA paper aims to examine the hermeneutic significance of art, particularly theatre, in Margaret Atwood's novel *Hag-Seed* (2016), which is a contemporary adaptation of William Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* (1611). The analysis focuses on the ways in which art can blur the line between reality and illusion and how it can serve equally as a tool of revenge and a means of forgiveness. Leaning on Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy and Linda Hutcheon's insights into adaptation, this MA paper analyses how the process of staging the play in the novel unfolds both as an act of deception and as an ethically transformative experience. As a result, this reading of *Hag-Seed* aims to show that Atwood's reframing of Shakespeare's play within a contemporary context demonstrates how art transcends its historical boundaries to reveal universal truths about what it means to be human.

Keywords: Margaret Atwood; Shakespeare; adaptation; theatre; hermeneutics.

1. Introduction

Art is a part of human existence that has existed for thousands of years, used for reflection, expression, and communication. The role of art in human society cannot be overstated, from early cave paintings to the modern-day digital screen. Art is both subjective and diverse, involving communication, interpretation, creativity, and expression. It can elicit emotions, stimulate ideas, alter perceptions, and represent social, cultural, and personal situations. The question is, therefore, what is art and what is its nature? Plato, for example, in *The Republic*, argues that art is an imitation (mimesis), which deceives the senses by presenting a deformed copy of reality. According to Plato, art can mislead people away from the truth. In particular, he condemns drama and poetry as follows "the tragic poet is an imitator, and thus, like all other imitators, he is thrice removed from the king and from the truth." (2013: 342). Since, according to his view, art is a mere imitation of the world of senses, which is itself an imitation of the world of forms or ideal truths, he views it as being deceptive.

This perception of "art as deception" is one that varies from the more modern perceptions, which are apt to view art as a way of revealing truths or expressing more fundamental meanings. Hans Georg Gadamer, for example, views art as presenting a kind of insight or revelation of the essence of things, a glimpse beyond the surface of things, into a higher, eternal truth. According to Gadamer, "through a work of art a truth is experienced that we cannot attain in any other way" (2004: xxi). Gadamer argues that "the work of art has its true being" (2004: 103), which allows to see beyond appearances and into "the inner essence" which becomes "the first and true reality." (2004: 208).

Linda Hutcheon, in her work *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, argues that "postmodernism is a contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts, the very concepts it challenges — be it in architecture, literature, painting, sculpture, film, video, dance, TV, music, philosophy, aesthetic theory, psychoanalysis, linguistics, or historiography." (1988: 3). Although Hutcheon does not directly use the notion of "deception" and "revelation", in postmodern literature, art can be seen as both "deception" and "revelation" in modes that undermine standard notions of truth, meaning, and representation. It is an illusion, on the one hand, in the sense that it presents fractured, ironic, and self-reflexive narratives that undermine any confident or unproblematic hold on reality. It is a disclosure, on the other hand, of the constructed nature of meaning itself, revealing how language, culture, and ideology organize our perceptions of the world. By this mixture of concealment and disclosure, postmodern fiction invites readers to become increasingly self-conscious about the processes of storytelling, meaning-making, and the ideological determinants that govern perceptions of truth.

Margaret Atwood (born 1939) is a contemporary representative of postmodern Canadian literature. According to Hutcheon, "Atwood is at ease with the political dimension of postmodernism, and always has been." (1988: 138). After more than half a century of literary activity, Atwood has gained wide popularity not only in her own country but also abroad. She is a prominent Canadian poet, novelist, literary critic, and public figure. Atwood is the author of 18 novels, nine short story collections, 18 poetry collections, 11 non-fiction books, eight children's books, and two graphic novels. She has won many literary prizes and awards. Among them there are two Booker Prizes for her novels *The Blind Assassin* (2000) and *The Testaments* (2019), two Governor General's Awards for the poetry collection *The Circle Game* (1966) and the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), the Arthur C. Clarke Award for *The Handmaid's Tale* (1987) and many others.

The reasons for such popularity, according to Graham Huggan, are due to Atwood's ability to develop the widest range of topics, as well as take on diverse and public roles as a writer, feminist, and environmentalist. (Huggan 2001: 214-217). Atwood's novels become bestsellers all over the world. According to David Staines, Atwood has remained a popular author for more than forty years, because she is "well known for the intricacies of her poetry, the power of her fiction, and the illumination of her literary criticism" (Staines 2006: 12).

Additionally, Atwood has played a significant role in identifying and asserting a unique literature of Canada, with a special focus to setting it apart from both American and British literature, the affirmation of national consciousness and national literary creativity. She examines the works of Canadian writers and identifies what she believes to be some of the more prevalent themes in Canadian literature in her seminal critical book, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972), published in the same year as her novel *Surfacing*, which, according to Nathalie Cooke "introduces the theme of Canadian nationalism and corresponding concerns about the preservation of the Canadian wilderness, together with a very accurate depiction of Canadian regional geography." (2004: 53). According to Staines, Atwood's literary career is related to the emergence of a uniquely Canadian literary genre: "As Atwood discovered her voice as a Canadian writer of poetry, fiction, and literary criticism, she helped the country discover its own life as a literary landscape." (Staines 2006: 19). Moreover, Atwood is described by Coral Ann Howells as "a Canadian voice in global culture as a major thinker, writer, and public spokesperson on issues of environmentalism and human rights, especially women's and Indigenous rights." (2021: 1).

Atwood's work has attracted the attention of numerous researchers (Grace, 1980; Sullivan, 1998; Cooke, 2004; Howells, 2006, 2021; Bickford, 2023, and many others). Critics note the originality and diversity of the poetics, themes, problems, generic conventions, and images that Atwood creates. Atwood's writing cannot be categorized under any single literary tradition, as Cooke puts it: "Atwood's work is located at the intersection of three distinct, though related, literary traditions: feminist, Canadian nationalist, and postmodern." (2004: 19). Although Atwood resists to be named as a feminist writer ("I'm pre-feminist, that is, I came of age before any of that happened."[1] (Atwood, 2013)), scholars agree that one of the prominent features of Atwood's writing is her examination of the complexities of gender dynamics and societal expectations, particularly a viewpoint on female body. As Sarah A. Appleton argues:

> *Whether her body has been in danger of corporeal obliteration as in The Edible Woman and Lady Oracle, re-encoded and incarcerated by dominant males as in The Handmaid's Tale, belittled and conscripted as in Cat's Eye, commodified as in The Blind Assassin, fantasized into extinction as in Oryx and Crake, subdued and replicated as in The Heart Goes Last, each female is tasked with – and often initially fails at – regaining her authentic body. (2021: 61).*

In other words, Atwood's characters frequently struggle with the limitations placed on them, offering a critique of patriarchal systems.

In addition to her feminist viewpoint, Atwood is renowned for her use of the dystopian genre, although she herself prefers the name "speculative fiction". In novels like *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and *MaddAddam* (2013), *The Heart Goes Last* (2015), and *The Testaments* (2019), Atwood vividly imagines dystopian worlds in which political, social, and environmental catastrophes or technological breakthroughs have caused society to collapse or undergo significant change. Atwood exposes the perils of complacency and apathy while criticizing modern society through her dystopian realms. As Howells argues: "her [Atwood's] choice of a female narrator turns the traditionally masculine dystopian genre upside down" (2006: 164) thus, Atwood's writing has influenced a new wave of dystopian fiction and made room for discussions about how literature may address social and political challenges.

Another significant theme in Atwood's writing is a critical reflection on the past. Her first self-published poetry collection *Double Persephone* (1961) demonstrated Atwood's interest in this topic, as she claims herself: "As long as you continue to write, you continue to explore the work of writers who have preceded you". (Atwood 2002: 178). This interest later developed into short fictions, such as "Gertrude Talks Back," from *Good Bones* (1992), where Hamlet's mother recounts what

[1] The Sunday Rumpus Interview: Margaret Atwood. Available at: https://therumpus.net/2013/01/20/the-sunday-rumpus-interview-margaret-atwood/)

happened and in the 2008 short tale "Payback," where Atwood reimagines Ebenezer Scrooge as a twenty-first century businessman who realizes how damaging his actions are to the environment. Other examples include the novel *The Robber Bride* (1993), which rewrites the Grimm Brothers' story "The Robber Bridegroom", *Alias Grace* (1996), a neo-Victorian fiction based on real events, and *The Penelopiad* (2005), which reinterprets Homer's *Odyssey*.

As it is obvious, Atwood is prone to experiments, both artistic and philosophical. Thus, no wonder that in 2013 she was invited to participate in a project dedicated to the four-hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's death, which included Hogarth Press preparing the publication of a series of novels that address Shakespeare's creative heritage and adapt it for the modern reader. The series consist of Jeanette Winterson's *The Gap of Time* (2015), a retelling of *The Winter's Tale*, Howard Jacobson's *Shylock Is My Name* (2016), a retelling of *The Merchant of Venice*, Anne Tyler's *Vinegar Girl* (2016), a retelling of *The Taming of the Shrew*, Tracy Chevalier's *New Boy* (2017), a retelling of *Othello*, Jo Nesbo's *Macbeth* (2018), a retelling of *Macbeth*, and Edward St. Aubyn's *Dunbar* (2017), a retelling of *King Lear*.

Atwood's contribution to the Hogarth Shakespeare project is her novel *Hag-Seed* (2016), a retelling of *The Tempest*. Atwood saw the task of rewriting the play as a chance to "tease out the complexities"[2] (Atwood, 2016) of the characters and address the questions that were left unanswered. In *Hag-Seed*, she moved *The Tempest* into the twenty-first century, the era of YouTube, rap lyrics, and new drama. The plot of the novel centres on the story of Felix Phillips, who is a successful director and curator of a theater festival, staging Shakespeare's plays. When Felix loses his job due to the machinations of his colleagues, he decides to leave for the Canadian outback to lick his wounds, talk to the ghost of his dead daughter Miranda, and hatch a plan for revenge. The local prison offers Felix an opportunity to teach prisoners, and Felix returns to a once unrealized plan: to stage a radically new version of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and, at the same time, to take revenge on his enemies.

Shakespeare's plays are exceptional in the history of world theatre and his influence on the art of the stage and playwriting has been immeasurable. Shakespearean roles have always been the culmination of acting talent, a dream, and a desire to create one's own *Hamlet, Othello, King Lear*, and many other characters. In art, Shakespeare and the world he created have become a bright mosaic of representations in works of painting, music, cinema, and, of course, literature.

[2] The Guardian. A perfect storm: Margaret Atwood on rewriting Shakespeare's *Tempest*. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/sep/24/margaret-atwoodrewriting-shakespeare-tempest-hagseed.)

Unsurprisingly, Shakespeare's creative legacy has been the subject of numerous scientific, historical, and literary studies, as well as adaptations, rewritings, and retellings.

The Tempest may not be among the most popular or well-known of Shakespeare's plays, such as *Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, A Midsummer's Night Dream,* etc. However, in Frank Kermode's words, "[it] is unquestionably the most sophisticated comedy of a poet whose work in comedy is misunderstood to a quite astonishing degree." (1954: lxxxvii-lxxxviii). Moreover, there are a lot of contraindications in defining the genre of this play. While Harold Bloom agrees with Kermode that *The Tempest* is "strongest of all Shakespearean comedies (it is not a Romance)" (Bloom 2008: xii), Jan Kott interprets it as "a great Renaissance tragedy of lost illusions." (1965: 266) and Northrop Frye, alongside with Marjorie Garber, defines it as a romance.

Alongside its generic ambivalence, *The Tempest* provides a wide-ranging area of study for scholars and literary critics. Thus, Kermode summarizes what he believes to be the play's main theme:

> *The main opposition is between the worlds of Prospero's Art, and Caliban's Nature. Caliban is the core of the play; like the shepherd in formal pastoral, he is the natural man against whom the cultivated man is measured. [...] Caliban represents (at present we must oversimplify) nature without benefit of nurture; Nature, opposed to an Art which is man's power over the created world and over himself; nature divorced from grace, or the senses without the mind.* (1954: xxiv-xxv).

By re-evaluating the play's form in light of the pattern of the concepts of Art and Nature, Kermode offers a new direction in scholarship and a fresh approach to criticism.

Garber's reading of *The Tempest* in *Shakespeare After All* (2005) shares Kermode's viewpoint and similarly argues that the play raises questions about the relationship between nature and nurture, particularly through the character of Caliban, who is depicted as a "born devil" whose nature cannot be changed by education or civilization. This theme is juxtaposed with the more noble qualities of Miranda, who, despite her isolation, exhibits kindness and innocence. Developing the idea about Art and Nature, Garber claims that Prospero is seen as a "man-the-artist, or man-the-scholar", whereas "Ariel and Caliban represent his ethereal and material selves — the one airy, imaginative, and swift; the second earthy, gross, and appetitive." (2005: 852) Moreover, Garber discusses colonial and postcolonial readings, which critique Prospero as a colonizer who displaces Caliban, the island's native ruler, and enslaves him. This interpretation reflects the historical context of European exploration and the exploitation of Indigenous peoples during Shakespeare's time.

By contrast, Bloom rejects the postcolonial, as well as any other "politicized", reading. In his work *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (1998), Bloom argues that "Of all Shakespeare's plays, the two visionary comedies — *A Midsummer Dream Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* — these days share the sad distinction of being the worst interpreted and performed." (1998: 662). Bloom highlights that critics, influenced by contemporary ideologies, often misread Caliban as a heroic figure, rather than understanding him as a "poignant but cowardly" (Bloom 1998: 662) character, which Shakespeare intended. Nevertheless, Bloom also argues that one of the main themes of the play is Art, as he suggests that Prospero's magic can "be understood to represent Shakespeare's art" (Bloom 2008: 23).

Critics like Northrop Frye and Jan Kott, too, emphasize the significance of illusions and the theatre in *The Tempest*. According to Frye, "For Shakespeare was a man of the theatre who concentrated intensely on the theatrical experience: we may even say that in every play he wrote the central character is the theatre itself." (1993: 69). Similarly, Kott argues that "The island is the world, the world is a stage, and all the people in it are actors. Prospero has only staged a performance, brief and fleeting like life itself." (1965: 275-276). Thus, the theatre itself serves as a metaphor for the illusory nature of life, blurring the lines between reality and performance and reinforcing the idea that "in a theatre the illusion is the reality." (Frye 1993: 69). The stage represents the world, where life itself is a performance. In this view, Shakespeare's characters, including kings, lovers, and clowns, all play their parts in a grand illusion that mirrors real-life struggles and power dynamics.

Ultimately, *The Tempest* is an extremely interpretable play, as almost any meaning and point of view can be applied to it. As Stephen Greenblatt explains:

> *The central preoccupations of almost all his [Shakespeare's] plays are there in The Tempest: the story of brother betraying brother; the corrosive power of envy; the toppling of a legitimate ruler; the dangerous passage from civility to the wilderness; the dream of restoration; the wooing of a beautiful young heiress in ignorance of her social position; the strategy of manipulating people by means of art, especially through the staging of miniature plays-within-plays; the cunning deployment of magical powers; the tension between nature and nurture; the father's pain at giving his daughter to her suitor; the threat of social death and the collapse of identity; the overwhelming, transformative experience of wonder.* (2004: pdf 347).

Despite many different visions and interpretations, it can be stated that critics agree that Art, its nature and power are among the main themes of *The Tempest*.

It has to be said that *The Tempest* is not the only play with which Atwood establishes a dialogue in *Hag-Seed*. Through intertextual threads she speaks to many Shakespeare's plays, such as *Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear*, and others. One of these threads, which connects Atwood's novel to the

Shakespearean world is the father-daughter relationship, which is also one of the major themes both in the bard's comedies and tragedies. Due to differences in gender, age, status, and social expectations, father and daughter are inherently and socially the most opposed members of a family. As Oliver Ford Davies explains: "The dramatic possibilities for conflict and/or growing dependence are endless, and Shakespeare particularly relished writing such clashes, perhaps because of his delight in creating a whole range of elderly men, fathers to a single daughter." (2017: 4). The majority of daughters in Shakespeare's plays exhibit rebellion and resistance, often defying their fathers' authority and commands. Obedience is portrayed as the primary obligation of every daughter and while, Shakespeare's comedies allow daughters the freedom to make their own decisions and still achieve happiness, in his tragedies, Shakespeare is less forgiving towards his female protagonists, denying them the same fortunate outcomes that their male counterparts may receive.

Another thread that connects Atwood's *Hag-seed* to Shakespeare's plays is the presence of the supernatural. According to Victoria Bladen and Yan Brailowsky:

> *Supernatural elements constitute a significant dimension of Shakespeare's plays: ghosts haunt political spaces and internal psyches; witches foresee the future and disturb the present; fairies meddle with love; natural portents and dreams foreshadow events; and a magus conjures a tempest from the elements.* (2020: 1)

Almost all of Shakespeare's plays, including *Richard III, Hamlet, Macbeth, The Winter's Tale*, and many others, have elements of the uncanny. Yet while early plays like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* employ magic to represent the supernatural power of love to create a surreal world, later plays, particularly the great tragedies, banish any joy or laughter. In *Hamlet*, for example, the ghost's apparition causes the prince to think about retribution. In *Macbeth*, by the appearance of Banquo's ghost, Macbeth's mental state is disturbed. In *The Tempest* Prospero employs magic to control both human and non-human characters throughout the play. Obviously, Atwood is aware of the significance of the supernatural in Shakespeare's theatrical paradigm, thus, in her novel, Miranda appears as a ghost, clearly alluding to *Hamlet, Richard III*, and *Macbeth*.

The last but not least meaningful Shakespearean thread in *Hag-Seed* is the significance of dreams. Garber, in her book *Dream in Shakespeare. From Metaphor to Metamorphosis* (2013), methodically explores Shakespeare's use of dreams in his plays. In Shakespearean drama, the dream concept, according to Garber, breaks down barriers between reality and illusion, influencing characters' knowledge and actions. Dreams tend to be reflections of one's innermost desires, conflicts, and fears, leading characters to question their understanding of truth and reality. This phenomenon creates a space where imagination governs experiences whereas dreams and visions

control narrative and character development. Garber argues that *The Tempest* is "the most remarkable of all Shakespeare's dream worlds", which "takes the dream state for its subject, deliberately and directly exploring the poles of sleeping and waking, vision and reality, art and the human condition." (2013: 186-187).

As it can be seen, Atwood's *Hag-Seed* offers a broad space for literary exploration and interpretation. However, most readings of the novel mainly focus on *Hag-Seed* as adaptation. Research which explores the novel from a different point of view has been relatively scant. For example, Paul Joseph Zajac, in his article "Prisoners of Shakespeare: Trauma and Adaptation in Atwood's *Hag-Seed*" explains how Atwood's novel employs intertextuality in an attempt to explore trauma. Drawing on Anne Whitehead's work, Zajac argues that trauma fiction has a tendency to disrupt temporality, mirroring the nature of trauma. Moreover, according to this scholar, Atwood's adaptation of Shakespeare is a true reflection of the nature of adaptation. He suggests that adaptation is not merely a creative act but also a response to trauma, allowing characters and readers to engage with their pasts. Zajac observes that the novel suggests that trauma and adaptation are ongoing processes. The positioning of a summary of *The Tempest* towards the end of *Hag-Seed* ensures that the reality of the story — and the trauma that is in it — still resonates: "As soon as readers finish Felix's story, the play seemingly starts over." (Zajac 2020: 338). Zajac concludes by noting how Atwood's novel is a reflection on the way in which narrative has the power to heal us, and on the continued grip the past has over us. According to the author, in the protagonist's journey, Atwood sees the double nature of adaptation as art and also as response to the traumas which make up our narratives.

In their article "Reading Reflections of *The Tempest*: Margaret Atwood's *Hag-Seed* from Postcolonial and Postmodernist Perspectives", Venkatesh Puttaiah and Sowmya A explore Atwood's *Hag-Seed* through both postcolonial and postmodernist lenses. According to these scholars, Atwood's novel, "[w]ritten by an acclaimed woman novelist from a developed country that was once colonised…invites postcolonial questions from its readers." (Puttaiah and A, 2021: 320). Moreover, they highlight the postmodernist elements of the novel, as it incorporates such tendencies as multiplicity, self-reflexivity, and parody. The narrative is described as a "theatre of endless possibilities," (Puttaiah and A, 2021: 319). where the interplay of different narratives and perspectives challenges traditional storytelling. The scholars conclude by asserting that *Hag-Seed* not only pays tribute to Shakespeare but also serves as a contemporary commentary on colonialism, identity, and power dynamics, thus reflecting Atwood's belief in the "multiplicity of meanings a

narrative can sustain and the possibility of reinventing the narrative itself " (Puttaiah and A, 2021: 328).

Enikő Pal and Judit Pieldner, in their article "'A Sea Change into Something Rich and Strange.' Margaret Atwood's *Hag-Seed*: A Metatextual Approach" explore Atwood's *Hag-Seed* not only as an adaptation but a complex reimagining that engages with the themes of the original while also commenting on the nature of adaptation itself. The authors reference Hutcheon's idea that adaptation involves "appropriating or salvaging," which is a "double process of interpreting and then creating something new." (Pal and Pieldner 2023: 19). Furthermore, these scholars emphasize the metatheatrical aspects of *Hag-Seed*, where the prison setting serves as a modern-day "Prospero's island." (Pal and Pieldner 2023: 30). They argue that Atwood's adaptation encourages readers to consider the role of art and theatre as a means of achieving freedom, both metaphorically and psychologically and conclude that *Hag-Seed* is a rich, multilayered text that not only reinterprets *The Tempest* but also engages with contemporary cultural and social issues, including "precarity and creativity, anxiety and trauma processing, etc." (Pal and Pieldner 2023: 2).

This MA thesis aims to explore the relationship between Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Atwood's *Hag-Seed*, by examining how Atwood's novel both honors and transforms Shakespeare's original text while addressing contemporary social and cultural concerns. By analyzing the transformation of Shakespeare's work through Atwood's retelling, this research aims to contribute to our understanding of the continuing relevance of Shakespearean themes, particularly the notion of art, in contemporary culture. While making use of Hutcheon's conceptualization of adaptation in a way that the previous studies of Atwood's *Hag-Seed* have also done, this MA thesis is organized around the questions of art and the nature and power of (theatrical) imagination, which have so far escaped critical attention. Posited in this light, this MA thesis aims to explore the broad implications of "art as deception" and "art as revelation" in Atwood's *Hag-Seed*.

In structural terms, this MA thesis proceeds with an overview of the theoretical framework employed in the analysis of the novel, namely, Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, which anchors this reading of *Hag-Seed* as a living process of engagement between different temporal, cultural, and individual contexts. The ensuing analysis of the novel consists of two parts, each of which addresses issues of the complexity of the nature of art, but from different perspectives. The chapter "Art as Deception in Atwood's *Hag-Seed*" discusses how the act of staging the play becomes an act of deception, whereas the following chapter, "Art as Revelation in Atwod's *Hag-Seed*" discusses the transformational potential of art, suggesting that Atwood's

reframing of Shakespeare's play within a contemporary context shows how art transcends its historical boundaries to reveal universal truths. The conclusions of this MA thesis are presented in the last chapter.

2. Horizons of Adaptation:
A Hermeneutic Approach to Intertextual Transformation

This chapter focuses on Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as well as Linda Hutcheon's notions on adaptation. Atwood's *Hag-seed* is an adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, which deals with the question of art, one of the main questions Gadamer is preoccupied with, therefore the concepts from each theoretical perspective will reinforce the analysis and support the claims made in the following chapters. Analyzing adaptations, like Atwood's *Hag-seed,* through Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics perspective is beneficial because it enables one to understand how an adaptation does more than simply offer a new context for a work of art but also opens up new possibilities for understanding.

2.1. Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method*

Having originated as an interpretation of texts, which Friedrich Schleiermacher described as "the art of understanding" (Schleiermacher cited in Palmer 1969: 84), hermeneutics has gradually acquired the status of a universal humanitarian method. Thanks to the works of Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jürgen Habermas, and others, the phenomenon of understanding and interpreting have received and continue to receive a lot of critical attention.

Truth and Method (1960) is Hans-Georg Gadamer's magnum opus, which presents his theory of philosophical hermeneutics. According to Richard E. Palmer, "Gadamer, following the lead of Heidegger, has developed the implications of Heidegger's contribution to hermeneutics [...] into a systematic work on 'philosophical hermeneutics.'" (1969: 42). Instead of focusing on the practical issues of developing appropriate norms for interpretation, Gadamer aims to highlight the phenomenon of understanding itself. Like Heidegger, Gadamer sees understanding "as the universal determinateness of Dasein" (2004: xxxiv), a dimension of being which precedes any methodological reflection. Gadamer describes the nature of understanding in a general ontological sense: "*Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition*, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated." (2004: 291, italics in original). Thus, "what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing" (Gadamer 2004: xxvi) is one of the central aspects of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. This suggests that comprehension ceases to be a willed act of consciousness and instead becomes something that also occurs to us. Gadamer reinterprets understanding as an ontological and practical experience rather than an epistemological discipline. Therefore, for him, the goal of his hermeneutical investigations is to draw a whole image of understanding.

In order to do that, Gadamer appeals to tradition, which is "essentially, preservation" (2004: 282). In this regard, he criticizes the Enlightenment, which in its "progressive retreat of magic in the world" (Gadamer 2004: 275) discredited tradition as a prejudice and opposed it to the light of reason. According to Gadamer, ignoring tradition runs counter to human historicity. Historicity here is conceived as a defining characteristic of human experience, which is the ontological prerequisite for its rootedness in tradition. In this sense, historicity includes the formation of common sense, judgment, internal tact, that is, everything that becomes the historical definition of an individual. Each individual is shaped by their culture, which influences the way of understanding. Tradition is a continuous process in which the past and the present are organically included. Gadamer opposes the attitude to tradition which considers it as something static and lifeless, infinitely removed from contemporaneity. Tradition, he argues, is present here and now, woven into everyday experience. It is an all-encompassing sphere in which continuous mediation of the past and the present occurs, "for there old and new are always combining into something of living value, without either being explicitly foregrounded from the other." (Gadamer 2004: 305). In other words, tradition with its prejudices do not stand in the way of understanding. rather, they enable it.

Gadamer also opposes the traditional understanding of prejudices as something false and subjective, and sees a different aspect in the concept of prejudice: prejudice is a preliminary reasoning that underlies the process of understanding. Therefore, prejudice does not hinder understanding, but rather promotes it. Knowing and understanding prejudice, one is able to understand tradition, which means understanding the time in which one lives, i.e., understanding the time in which the "object of understanding" lives. Thanks to prejudice, the formation of a single continuum between the interpreter and the interpreted is ensured. Prejudice promotes the transfer of experience, familiarity with time, and therefore is a guarantor of understanding:

> *A person who believes he is free of prejudices, relying on the objectivity of his procedures and denying that he is himself conditioned by historical circumstances, experiences the power of the prejudices that unconsciously dominate him as a vis a tergo. A person who does not admit that he is dominated by prejudices will fail to see what manifests itself by their light.* (Gadamer 2004: 354)

In other words, prejudice is a condition of preliminary understanding, or "fore-understanding", therefore, there is no person who could escape the influence of prejudice. Prejudice in this context becomes a prerequisite for human life, thinking, and understanding.

Another important part of the phenomenon of understanding is the personal experience of understanding. It is not only a capacity, but an urgent need for a personal reading of the text (the text is understood in a broad sense, as a certain reality that requires understanding itself), its rethinking and reassessment, or rewriting. According to Gadamer, understanding requires to be

shared because "the experience of historical tradition [...] always mediates truth in which one must *try to share.*" (2004: xxii, italics in original) However, we share something we understand (for example, a certain text) because its meaning has already affected us: "Understanding begins, [...] when something addresses us." (Gadamer 2004: 298). Consequently, Gadamer views understanding as a conversation, be it between two people, a text and an interpreter, or the past and the present. The participants of this conversation come into this conversation with their attitudes, beliefs, cultural and social environment, i.e. their horizons.

Gadamer describes the concept of horizon as follows "The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. Applying this to the thinking mind, we speak of narrowness of horizon, of the possible expansion of horizon, of the opening up of new horizons, and so forth." (2004: 301). In other words, a horizon is one's unique perspective of experiences that may consist of the specific social, cultural, historical, and linguistic aspects of one's background which frame one's reality and mold one's expectations of what the unknown may mean. These implicit aspects make up one's horizon and help one make sense of what is beyond the scope of one's limits. As Gadamer puts it, "a hermeneutical situation is determined by the prejudices that we bring with us. They constitute, then, the horizon of a particular present, for they represent that beyond which it is impossible to see." (2004: 304-305) In other words, each horizon speaks to a distinct context from which one can approach the other in a different way.

Having described Gadamer's concept of horizon, we can move on to his notion of a *fusion of horizons*. The fusion of horizons can be described as a site of an encounter and interaction of I and the other. However, such an encounter is not a static point or a place of stability, because each horizon is continuously shifting in relation to the other during the encounter. As Gadamer claims,

> *The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving. Thus the horizon of the past, out of which all human life lives and which exists in the form of tradition, is always in motion.* (2004: 303).

Therefore, the process of the fusion of horizons is ongoing and never-ending. This is the process by which understanding itself is revealed. As Gadamer claims, "understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves." (2004: 305). Another explanation on the concept of the fusion of horizons is provided by David Vessey:

> *Horizons fuse when an individual realizes how the context of the subject matter can be weighted differently to lead to a different interpretation from the one initially arrived at. Either new information or a new sense of the relative significance of available information leads, at the very least, to an understanding of the contingency of the initial interpretation, quite possibly to a new understanding of the subject matter, and ideally to a new agreement between the two parties about*

> *the subject matter. In any case, the original understanding is surpassed and integrated into a broader, more informed understanding. Our horizons are broadened; we have a new perspective on our old views, and maybe new views as well. This is the meaning of 'the fusion of horizon'* (2009: 534).

Building on Vessey's insight, therefore, the fusion of horizons can be seen as a drive to broaden one's horizon rather than to escape it. In other words, the notion of the fusion of horizons is an event of understanding, where different horizons unfold as open paths to understanding the other.

A concomitant process, which explains the dynamics of understanding, is Gadamer's idea of play, which is inextricably linked to his view of art. Gadamer does not address art as an issue of analytic study or aesthetic pleasure; rather, he sees art as a site of the revelation of truth and our understanding of the world. Therefore, Gadamer argues that the experience of art is the source of philosophical hermeneutics' credibility as an event of understanding: "The fact that through a work of art a truth is experienced that we cannot attain in any other way constitutes the philosophic importance of art" (Gadamer 2004: xxi). But what is this "truth"? As Jean Grondin notes, "Gadamer ultimately spoke little enough of "truth" as such in regaining truth for art" (2003: 53). In fact, even though Gadamer includes the word "truth" in the title of *Truth and Method*, there is no explanation on what, in his opinion, "truth" is. For someone attempting to define "truth" in Gadamer's work, this can be quite discouraging. It gets even more difficult when attempting to understand how "truth", which is still undefined, might relate to art. However, if we understand Gadamer's concept of "truth" in art as the concept of "revelation" (Grondin 2003: 53), or "disclosure" (Krajewski 2004: 107), then it becomes possible to suggest that the "truth" of art is understanding, which includes "*self-understanding*" (Gadamer 2004: 251, italics in original), encompassing both "a historical decision and not […] something one possesses and controls" (Gadamer 2004: 522) and "the understanding of the world" (Gadamer 2004: 484). In other words, art opens our eyes and reveals a reality we would not otherwise be able to uncover, moreover, art offers us an experience of understanding by presenting us with the truth of things but in a way that necessitates an encounter with ourselves.

Given that art is dynamic rather than static and participatory rather than the creation of a single artist, in Gadamer's conception, it operates on the logic of play. Play, in Gadamer's view, is "neither the orientation nor even the state of mind of the creator or of those enjoying the work of art, nor the freedom of a subjectivity engaged in play, but the mode of being of the work of art itself." (2004: 102). In other words, it is not a work of art that plays with a player or a player with a work of art, but rather the very essence of the play is an experience or an active relationship where there is a constant movement between the consciousness of an experiencer and a work of art. Gadamer

emphasizes the concept of movement, as by the time one actually participates in play, one can no longer describe and determine the outcome of play. One plays, and that is an important process. By participating in play, one creates an experience, which one cannot predict because it is actually beyond one's control:

> *The movement of playing has no goal that brings it to an end; rather, it renews itself in constant repetition. The movement backward and forward is obviously so central to the definition of play that it makes no difference who or what performs this movement. The movement of play as such has, as it were, no substrate. It is the game that is played — it is irrelevant whether or not there is a subject who plays it. The play is the occurrence of the movement as such.* (Gadamer 2004: 104)

This makes one understand that one has never been the real master of play. For example, this can be reflected in the art of dance, where a dancer follows the rhythm imposed by the music. A dancer cannot impose his rhythm on the music, he controls his body so that his rhythmic movements are in harmony with the music. Thus, a dancer follows the music and its rhythm, and not vice versa. Moreover, a dance follows a pattern where movements occur as if by themselves, without purpose or effort. A dance seems to dissolve a dancer into itself, emphasizing that the subjectivity of a dancer is not important anymore.

Gadamer claims that "What holds the player in its spell, draws him into play, and keeps him there is the game itself" (2004: 106). The idea of being drawn into play or fascinated by the movement of the play of a work of art de-emphasizes the subjectivity of a player. Despite the fact that play requires and involves space for improvised activity, responsive movement, and players, Gadamer minimizes the subjectivity of the players even if they are essential to the action of play: "The players are not the subjects of play; instead play merely reaches presentation (Darstellung) through the players". (Gadamer 2004: 103) It is precisely from this subjectivity of players that the experience of play has to be liberated in order to understand what it can reveal about aesthetic consciousness and the truth of a work of art. It is not a question of recalling the process of artistic creation, determined by technique, the genius of an individual artist, or the geometric techniques taught in art schools, but of telling about the lived experience when we are in front of a work of art, i.e. on the playground in full playful activity. According to Gadamer, "The "subject" of the experience of art, that which remains and endures, is not the subjectivity of the person who experiences it but the work itself. This is the point at which the mode of being of play becomes significant." (ibid.) In other words, it is precisely a work of art, that provokes our consciousness, that goes beyond our ordinary understanding, that provides a transcendent experience, and is the truth of a work of art. By engaging in the actual experience of a work of art, we become a part of it, or as Gadamer puts it: "Play fulfills its purpose only if the player loses himself in play." (ibid.) Thus, the player is not in control of the situation, because the game escapes his control. This description

of the nature of playfulness sheds new light on art and its meaning. While seeing a work of art, in a state of play, one is constantly thinking and a work of art is constantly transforming into something else, not identical to what it was before, thus revealing a new truth and facilitating understanding.

Gadamer highlights that understanding is an open historical process in which every interpreter and every interpreted are already included in the tradition of understanding. Understanding is always individual, it is relevant only at the moment of its revelation for each interpreter separately, therefore understanding becomes a kind of self-awareness. Our self-awareness, Gadamer believes, "is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. *That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being.*" (2004: 278, italics in original).

According to Gadamer, for humans, both a way of being and a way of thinking is language. At the heart of language is the ability of a person to be aware of being and to express this awareness. On the one hand, language expresses and fixes in consciousness different aspects of being, on the other hand, it "bears its own truth within it, i.e., it allows something to "emerge" which henceforth exists." (Gadamer 2004: 385). Thus, understanding is closely linked with language, since the entire complex of "fore-understanding" with which the interpreter approaches the interpretation of a work is fixed in language, a kind of cognitive "medium in which substantive understanding and agreement take place between two people." (Gadamer 2004: 386) In hermeneutical terms, the relation of the interpreter to the tradition is always dialogical and linguistic: "*Being that can be understood is language*" (Gadamer 2004: 470, italics in original). It should be noted that for Gadamer language is not just a tool for exchanging information, or an ethnic language, but a unity of thought and an environment in which we understand each other. Gadamer argues that "language is a medium where I and world meet or, rather, manifest their original belonging together." (2004: 469) Thus, language acts, on the one hand, as a carrier of cultural codes and forms of cultural experience deposited in it, and, on the other, as something capable of containing the truth of being. Thus, it reveals and creates a new reality.

Despite Gadamer's claim that *Truth and Method* is not a "system of rules" (2004: xxv), he does formulate concepts that have the character of systematic thinking. One of them is the principle of the *hermeneutical circle*. Gadamer emphasizes "the hermeneutical rule that we must understand the whole in terms of the detail and the detail in terms of the whole." (2004: 291). This becomes especially apparent when translating a text into a foreign language. Even before starting a detailed translation, the translator understands the general meaning and purpose of the text, compiles

sentences and only then tries to understand the meaning of individual words. Thus, understanding the text precedes the interpretation of words. At the same time, understanding the text as a whole and understanding its parts depend on each other, thus interpretation and understanding are inextricably linked. As Palmer puts it:

> *For the interpreter to "perform" the text, he must "understand" it: he must preunderstand the subject and the situation before he can enter the horizon of its meaning. Only when he can step into the magic circle of its horizon can the interpreter understand its meaning. This is that mysterious "hermeneutical circle" without which the meaning of the text cannot emerge.* (1969: 25)

In other words, understanding is not merely superficial but is actually a more sensitive awareness of the subject and context in which the text finds itself. Every reader or interpreter brings with him his present knowledge, assumptions, and expectations, which form a framework of reference within which the meaning of the text can be approached. Reading a text is moving back and forth between the whole and the parts. In order to understand a passage, for example, one must view it in the light of the entire work (the "whole") and also in the light of the meaning of the words or phrases (the "detail"). This circular process continues: the more one understands, the fuller one's conception of both whole and parts becomes. Thus, meaning is not something fixed and independent of the interpreter but something that emerges out of an interactive process between the interpreter's preunderstanding and the text. Without this active, circular process, true understanding would be impossible.

To conclude, in Gadamerian hermeneutics absolute understanding (truth) is not possible because understanding is always an interpretation and a fusion of horizons. Any text is the subject of many interpretations that are beyond an author's intentions. According to Gadamer, "The real meaning of a text, as it speaks to the interpreter, does not depend on the contingencies of the author and his original audience." (2004: 296) In other words, the meaning of a text depends on the interpreters. Therefore, understanding is not so much a discovery of meanings, but rather their constant and repeated generation. A person reading a text always has a certain prejudice ("fore-understanding"), i.e. social, historical, and personal experience, knowledge, opinions. This cannot be excluded. But as an interpreter immerses himself or herself in a text, the prejudice itself changes. Therefore, knowledge and understanding of a text and context expand. From the hermeneutical perspective, a text itself sets the conditions for its understanding, to which the interpreter responds by approaching the text with his or her own prejudices. This is how the fusion of horizons occurs. An absolute fusion of horizons is, of course, impossible. Understanding is the fusion of historical horizons, where the reader, in order achieve understanding and truth, must conduct a constant dialogue with the text, with the world of today and the world of history.

2.2. Linda Hutcheon's Theory of Adaptation

Adaptation can be seen as an applied version of hermeneutical thinking. Both fields are interested in the interpretation of texts in new contexts, in transformations which create new meanings, engage in an active, dialogic process of meaning-making, and refuse fixed truths. By using hermeneutics to conceptualize adaptation, it is possible to acknowledge the richness and complexity of the acts of interpretation involved in revising and revitalizing cultural tradition.

In her book *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), Linda Hutcheon examines a number of questions pertaining to the subject of converting from one media to another as central to the theorizing about adaptation. Hutcheon presents important insights into the inner workings of adaptations, the motives for adapting, and the reasons why adaptations are, contrary to the popular belief, "not derivative or second-rate" (Hutcheon 2006: 169). Given that adaptations "are everywhere today" (Hutcheon 2006: 2), i.e. they can be seen in a variety of mediums, including video games, amusement parks, opera, theater, television, movies, etc., they deserve serious intellectual attention.

For Hutcheon, "[all] art is derived from other art; stories are born of other stories" (2006: 2). In other words, like other artistic works, adaptation is a creative action that can exist independently, offering a fresh perspective, meaning, and interpretation rather than only being a derivative of the original work. She provides an example of Shakespeare, who was the great adaptor himself and who "transferred his culture's stories from page to stage." (Hutcheon 2006: 2). Indeed, Shakespeare's status as a Western literary canon makes him a prime candidate for adaptation. According to Hutcheon, "Adaptations of Shakespeare, in particular, may be intended as tributes or as a way to supplant canonical cultural authority. As Marjorie Garber has remarked, Shakespeare is for many adapters 'a monument to be toppled'" (cited in Hutcheon 2006: 93).

In Hutcheon's view, "an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative — a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing." (2006: 9). This means that an adaptation is a unique stand-alone piece of art, even though "haunted at all times by their adapted texts." (Hutcheon 2006: 6). Seen this way, adaptations unfold as creative and interpretive activities that preserve the atmosphere of the original text while also containing a "palimpsestic doubleness." (Hutcheon 2006: 120). They are repetitions with variations rather than replications or reproductions; they are "deliberate, announced, and extended revisitations of prior works" (Hutcheon 2006: xiv). This idea echoes Gadamer's argument about the importance of tradition, where tradition informs but does not constrain interpretation. Both Gadamer and Hutcheon argue that interpretation is a conversation across time, where the past and the present mutually illuminate each other.

Importantly, Hutcheon emphasizes the dual nature of adaptation as both a final "product" and an ongoing "process". (Hutcheon 2006: 9). The "product" describes the adaptation itself: the novel, film, or theatrical production that emerges when a creator draws upon a prior work. In order to avoid plagiarism concerns, the adaptation must deviate sufficiently from the original text while preserving the essential concepts of the source. Therefore, the final result cannot be completely true to the original text. Hutcheon draws a comparison between adaptation and translation, arguing that:

> *In many cases, because adaptations are to a different medium, they are re-mediations, that is, specifically translations in the form of intersemiotic transpositions from one sign system (for example, words) to another (for example, images). This is translation but in a very specific sense: as transmutation or transcoding, that is, as necessarily a recoding into a new set of conventions as well as signs.* (2006: 16).

In other words, to suit the requirements of a new work, form, focus, topics, characters, or even the narrative can be somewhat altered. These requirements might be dictated by "a particular cultural environment" (Hutcheon 2006: 31). Cultural environment changes and a text can either adapt and change with the culture or be left behind, for, as Hutcheon puts it, "An adaptation, like the work it adapts, is always framed in a context — a time and a place, a society and a culture; it does not exist in a vacuum." (2006: 142). Therefore it is crucial for a text to "evolve and mutate to fit new times and different places." (Hutcheon 2006: 176). Hutcheon's claim about the importance of a context mirrors the notion of the hermeneutical circle, which, simply put, is "a context of meaning" (Palmer 1969: 18). The "process" aspect highlights the act of engaging with an existing text, the choices made by an adapter, and the interpretive labor performed by audiences who recognize the intertextual references. This idea of "process" reflects Gadamer's claims about understanding, which is not a passive reception of meaning, but rather an active, dialogical process, that occurs when horizons fuse.

Audience plays a significant role in this process, as an adaptation is presented to two types of audience, which are "knowing" and "unknowing" audiences. According to Hutcheon:

> *If we know the work(s) in question, we become a knowing audience, and part of what hermeneutic theory calls our "horizon of expectation" involves that adapted text. What is intriguing is that, afterward, we often come to see the prior adapted work very differently as we compare it to the result of the adapter's creative and interpretive act.* (2006: 121).

"Unknowing" audiences are described as follows: "If we do not know that what we are experiencing actually is an adaptation or if we are not familiar with the particular work that it adapts, we simply experience the adaptation as we would any other work." (Hutcheon 2006: 120). This differentiation of audiences is essential, because "knowing" audiences perceive an adaptation as such and can participate in an ongoing "dialogical process" (Hutcheon 2006: 21) that focuses on

contrasting the two works. Gadamer also emphasizes the significance of the audience. He argues that there is never just one single stable interpretation for a text; rather, meaning changes from interpretation to interpretation, bearing the imprint of the particular person and his or her prejudices, the act of interpreting and the historical and social situation into which that person has been placed.

Hutcheon claims that by highlighting the connection between individual works (the source text and its adaptation), a number of theories have contested the ideas of "originality, uniqueness, and autonomy" (Hutcheon 2006: 21) which have negatively dominated the conversation surrounding adaptations. In her view, however, this works best with texts that are recognizable, where viewers or readers are accustomed to the various versions. For example, most modern vampire films can be regarded as adaptations of Bram Stoker's book. These well-known adaptations are referred to as "multilaminated," (Hutcheon 2006: 21), indicating their direct and transparent connection to the earlier, recognizable works "and that connection is part of their formal identity, but also of what we might call their hermeneutic identity." (Hutcheon 2006: 21). Here, the "formal identity" refers to adaptation's structural qualities — what makes it recognizable as an adaptation of a particular work. The "hermeneutic identity" is the way in which an audience comes to know and interpret the work based on its connection to these other recognizable works or cultural references. The "hermeneutic identity" of an adaptation can be understood in relation to Gadamer's idea of play. When a work of art is being read in a dynamic, interactive manner, adaptations invite the audience to participate in the play of meaning-making by connecting the adapted work to its original and to other cultural references. The audience's interpretation is not fixed but is free-flowing on the basis of their interaction with these layers of meaning.

In hermeneutical terms, the process of adapating is equally dynamic. As cultural environment shifts, when adapting a narrative, adaptors encounter a number of challenges. First and foremost, the adapters need to think about the differences between the various media, time and place, their advantages and disadvantages, and how these could affect the narrative. Adaptors have to balance in order to match the new medium without leaving out essential storytelling components. This balancing is necessary because audiences, which are the foundation of any adaptation's success, will undoubtedly forget it if they are not pleased with the imaginative decisions the adapters made to the plot. Similarly, adapters have to maintain their commitment to the original work, which calls for a degree of deference that restricts the adaptation's inventiveness and potential. Thus, the question of fidelity arises. According to Hutcheon, an adaptation can make enough changes to be an adaptation: "The adapted text, therefore, is not something to be reproduced, but rather something to be interpreted and recreated, often in a new medium. It is [...] a reservoir of instructions, diegetic,

narrative, and axiological, that the adapter can use or ignore [...] for the adapter is an interpreter before becoming a creator." (2006: 84). In other words, Hutcheon suggests that "fidelity criticism" (2006: 6) is no longer relevant and adaptations can adopt their own interpretations and modifications. This idea can be connected to Gadamer's notion of "truth", which is not something static and fixed but rather fluid and emerging from understanding. Adaptations can reveal their own "truth" by setting the source text in a new context, calling attention to new interpretations or elements of the original. Thus, an adaptation's "truth" does not depend on its literal fidelity to the original.

Another significant aspect Hutcheon points to is that the motivations for a story's adaptations from one media to another must be taken into account. Although it is pointless to try to identify every single underlying motivation an adapter might have for changing a story in any way, one can consider these motivations based on the modifications they have made. Hutcheon claims that there are many different reasons for making adaptations, such as "economic, legal, pedagogical, political, and personal" (Hutcheon 2006: xv) and they "should be considered seriously by adaptation theory, even if this means rethinking the role of intentionality in our critical thinking about art in general." (Hutcheon 2006: 95). In other words, in order to reveal the layers that may exist in the presentation or representation of a story, the motives behind adaptations have to be carefully examined, because the reasons behind a work of art are nearly as significant as the art itself.

Hutcheon concludes with the question "What is the appeal of adaptation?" (2006: 172). Drawing on George Kubler's insights about human desires for both familiarity and novelty, Hutcheon claims that "Adaptations fulfill both desires at once." (2006: 173). In this regard, adaptations serve a dual purpose: they affirm cultural ideologies while also allowing for change and evolution in storytelling. Furthermore, adaptations do not diminish the original work but rather "keep that prior work alive, giving it an afterlife it would never have had otherwise." (Hutcheon 2006: 176). In addition, Hutcheon claims that adaptation has a "subversive potential" (2006: 174), which allows us to reframe our knowledge and expectations in order to alter our cultural understanding. As Hutcheon argues, adaptations "can obviously be used to engage in a larger social or cultural critique" (2006: 94). In other words, adaptations can become a means highlighting social problems and of coping with them. By making modern spins on the earlier narratives, adapters can bring awareness to the overlooked aspects of cultural heritage, thereby augmenting the audience's engagement with the source text and making storytelling an evolving process.

As can be seen from this chapter, Hutcheon's ideas about adaptation reinforce Gadamer's hermeneutical reasoning, illustrating how Gadamer's concepts can be applied in action. Together, they show how interpretation and art are continuous acts of creation. Both hermeneutics and the theory of adaptation serve as a reminder that understanding is an active, dynamic process guided by the interaction of the past and the present, an artist and audience.

The following chapter "Art as Deception in Atwood's *Hag-Seed*" explores how the performance of the play is a form of deception, while the subsequent chapter, "Art as Revelation in Atwood's *Hag-Seed*", addresses the transformative power of art.

3. Art as Deception in Margaret Atwood's *Hag-Seed*

In Atwood's *Hag-Seed*, art plays a central role in both the narrative and its thematic structure. Among other things, it is a vehicle for both the novel's take on deception and truth manipulation. Throughout the novel, art is seen as not just a means of creative expression but a tool of cunning trickery, particularly in theater and performance. The novel's protagonist, Felix Phillips, uses art to control perceptions, blur the lines between reality and illusion, and enact elaborate schemes of revenge. This chapter explores how Atwood thinks about art as a form of deception, examining the ways in which it challenges the boundaries of truth and reality.

Insofar as *Hag-Seed* is an adaptation of *The Tempest*, it shares with Shakespeare's play a concern for the experience of betrayal, deception, revenge, and forgiveness. In *Hag-Seed*, Atwood brings the events of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to present-day Canada. The novel's subtitle, *The Tempest Retold*, establishes its relationship to the Shakespearean play. The novel tells the story of Felix, the artistic director of the Makeshiweg Theatre Festival, who is dismissed by Tony Price, his right-hand man, and Sal O'Nally, the Heritage Minister. Taking advantage of Felix's frailty following the death of his wife and then his beloved daughter Miranda, Tony utilizes his connections and power to remove Felix from his position and have the board appoint Tony to his job. The dismissal becomes all the more painful, because Felix is in the middle of his production of *The Tempest*, which is expected to be the most ambitious and the most personal theatrical performance he has ever produced because it is aimed to become a memorial to his deceased daughter. After being deceived and betrayed, Felix voluntarily exiles himself and lives in a small hut in the woods. Felix has devoted his time to tracking down Tony and Sal and to imagining a life with his deceased daughter. After eight years in exile, Felix uses the false identity of Mr. Duke to apply for a teaching post at the Fletcher County Correctional Institute in the Literacy Through Literature program. After staging *Macbeth, Richard III*, and *Julius Caesar* with the inmates, he finds out that his enemies, who are now powerful political figures, are going to visit the prison, so he chooses to direct his previous project of *The Tempest* and finally accomplish his revenge. The prisoners, unaware of their teacher's real motives, are encouraged to participate in Felix's scheme because Tony and Sal intend to discontinue the educational program. With the help of the prisoners, Felix stages the play, which has two versions. The first version is a live performance for his enemies, and the second is a pre-recorded one, which is shown to the prison guards and other inmates. Thanks to Felix's interactive theater Tony and Sal are punished and Felix gets his job as an Artistic Director back. The novel concludes with the prisoners imagining *The Tempest's* characters' potential afterlife and the epilogue, in which Felix finally releases the ghost of his daughter and himself from the guilt he has been carrying since her death.

Like Prospero in *The Tempest*, Felix "make[s] magic" (Atwood 2016: 10) in his productions. His stagings "charm" and "wow [...] with wonder" (ibid., p. 10), and Felix himself is called "the cloud-riding enchanter." (ibid., p. 12). Felix's role as a "magician" is obvious not only in relation to his work as a director but also in his obsession to stage Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to "resurrect" his daughter Miranda, who died because of meningitis at the age of three:

> *This Tempest would be brilliant: the best thing he'd ever done. He had been — he realizes now — unhealthily obsessed with it. It was like the Taj Mahal, an ornate mausoleum raised in honor of a beloved shade, or a priceless jeweled casket containing ashes. But more than that, because inside the charmed bubble he was creating, his Miranda would live again.* (ibid., p. 17)

Felix engages in two forms of deception because of his circumstances: a conscious one, that tends to deceive anyone who would endanger his plan for revenge, and an unconscious process of self-deception which causes his daydreaming of Miranda as if still alive:

> *It began when he was counting time by how old Miranda would be, had she lived. She'd be five, then six; she'd be losing her baby teeth; she'd be learning to write. That sort of thing. Wistful daydreaming at first. But it was only a short distance from wistful daydreaming to the half-belief that she was still there with him, only invisible.* (ibid., p. 45)

Felix's self-deception can be seen as an adaptive reaction to the trauma of losing his daughter, which many of us could employ when faced with great grief, prefering the hope of deception over the despair of reality. Felix casts himself as Prospero, dreaming that it will help him, metaphorically speaking, to get his daughter back. He finds that the pain of grieving and desperation can only be reworked via his art, because, as Felix puts it, "didn't the best art have desperation at its core? Wasn't it always a challenge to Death? A defiant middle finger on the edge of the abyss?" (ibid., p. 16). His solution is to stage the relationship between father and daughter so that through this illusion his own Miranda would be brought back to life. In a sense, by adapting Shakespeare's play, Felix finds a method to reverse his past, at least for the duration of a performance. As a director, Felix dedicates himself fully to the planning of his work, driven as he is by a desire to defy death. Here, Atwood's novel gives center stage to the familiar trope of art (in this case theatrical art) as the secret to immortality.

Felix claims that "the island is a theatre. Prospero is a director. He's putting on a play, within which there's another play." (ibid., p. 116). Shakespeare used the structure of a play within a play in *Hamlet, A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Taming of the Shrew* because this plot device clarified the philosophical and artistic concept of theatrical illusion while also helping to resolve the plot's intricacies. This technique is similarly employed by Atwood to highlight the difference between illusion and reality, which is often blurred in a theatrical performance. Several of

Gadamer's main ideas, such as play, the fusion of horizons, and art's ability to make the past present through continuity, also have straightforward theatrical analogies. Gadamer describes theatre as an art of presence that finds meaning in contemporary application, contrasting with reenactment, which seeks to replicate historical conditions. Gadamer claims that "theater has the enormous and lasting advantage" (1986: 64) of engaging the community and fostering a shared experience. However, in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer briefly touches upon the idea that an actor's aim is to deceive:

> *If we describe from the point of view of the actor what his acting is, then obviously it is not transformation but disguise. A man who is disguised does not want to be recognized, but instead to appear as someone else and be taken for him. In the eyes of others he no longer wants to be himself, but to be taken for someone else. Thus he does not want to be discovered or recognized.* (2004: 111)

The theatrical art has the power to immerse in a performed illusion, which involves deception on the part of the playwright and actors, and self-deception on the part of the spectators. In an interview for The Guardian, Atwood claims that theater is the primary focus of *The Tempest*. According to her, it is "a play about a producer/director/playwright putting on a play – namely, the action that takes place on the island, complete with special effects – that contains another play, the masque of the goddesses. Of all Shakespeare's plays, this one is most obviously about plays, directing and acting."[3] (Atwood 2016). So is *Hag-Seed* a novel about theatre. However, in Atwood's story, as Howells puts it, "those illusions become the means of disruption and mind-altering change in real lives." (2017: 309).

This "mind-altering change" becomes obvious in the process of adaptating *The Tempest*. Felix nearly becomes one with Prospero. Along with playing Prospero's role in the prison adaptation, he acts as Prospero in real life and also uses Shakespeare's character as a tool for self-understanding. This is to say that Felix seeks to comprehend his predicament by talking to the prisoners about whether or not Prospero's actions in the play are justifiable: "So, is Prospero justified in what he does, considering his narrow range of options?" (Atwood 2016: 130). By explaining Prospero's "narrow range of options", as "the right to defend himself" (ibid., p. 130) Felix reduces inmates' hostility towards Prospero. Therefore, even though Tony is never specifically mentioned in the conversations, Felix feels validated in his choice to punish him when the other inmates concur with his interpretation of Prospero: "Let's vote again," says Felix. "Who's for yes?" This time all hands go up. Felix unclenches his shoulders: relief. Prospero is absolved, at least for the time being." (ibid., p. 130). In addition, as Anna Joanna Bartnicka notes, "Not only is the novel itself an adaptation of *The Tempest*, Felix's life depicted in it is one as well, and finally, the prison

[3] The Guardian A perfect storm: Margaret Atwood on rewriting Shakespeare's *Tempest*. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/sep/24/margaret-atwoodrewriting-shakespeare-tempest-hagseed.

performance is a separate adaptation too." (2021: 26) In fact, the prison performance has two different versions. The first version is the actual performance that is camouflaged as a prison riot and is captured on camera as proof to blackmail Tony. The second version is a pre-recorded one that is shown to the warden, guards, and other guests. This second version aims to conceal the performance of Felix's revenge and create the appearance of a parallel reality in which the performance is enjoyed as such, while the first version has an actual influence on the real life of Felix, his enemies, and inmates-actors. This multi-layered structure, as Bartnicka puts it, "is a statement, on Atwood's side, on the possibility of infinite multiplication of adaptations, like a Matryoshka doll, each with a different aim and a different level of connection to reality." (2021: 26)

One of these different aims is to create an illusion. In the novel, Felix claims that theatre is "the art of true illusions." (Atwood 2016: 79) In other words, the characters created by the director and playwright not only have a dual nature but also seem to live in two worlds: reality and fiction, the present and the past (i.e. memories and fantasies). In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer agrees with Francis Bacon's statement on "the tendency of the human mind always to remember what is positive and forget all instantiae negativae." (Gadamer 2004: 344), thus, recognizing that this is a fundamental characteristic of the human mind and that knowledge still depends partly on illusion. Illusion is an important component of human social life. By creating illusions it is possible to create one's ideal world, corresponding to one's values, desires, and aspirations. Felix plays with Shakespeare's play, as well as with the prison inmates to achieve his goals: to stage his version of *The Tempest* and perform vengeance. In Felix's hands, revenge becomes not only an act of retaliation but a carefully crafted performance, i.e. a form of art. Felix orchestrates events with precision. In doing so, he makes a clear connection between theatrical direction and the calculated nature of revenge. In other words, the novel asserts that a successful theatrical production, which would "challenge the audience" (Atwood 2016: 132), is the outcome of an extensive creative process that suggests a wide range of elements, including casting and "tech special effects, prompters, understudies. Costumes and props." (ibid., p. 136), which can be compared to the process of planning a revenge. Rather than calling up storms, Felix resorts to hidden cameras, video editing, and the hallucinogenic effects of recreational drugs to stage an illusion and manipulate the perception of his enemies. Whereas Prospero's magic operates in instantaneous time, Felix's illusions rest on planning, collaboration, and contemporary technologies.

Like Prospero's, Felix's revenge is not about violent force or physical harm — it is layered, creative, and deeply psychological. Nevertheless, his revenge is "tragic because […] it divides the protagonist against himself, casting him in incompatible roles" (Watson 2002: 174). Felix is a great

example of this division of the protagonist, much like Prospero, who, according to Stephen Orgel, has been seen "as a noble ruler and mage, a tyrant and megalomaniac, a necromancer, a Neoplatonic scientist, a colonial imperialist, a civilizer." (1987: 11). Felix is the victim of one story and the master manipulator of another. He feels guilty because of his daughter's death, thinking that perhaps it may have been prevented if he had not been so preoccupied with his work and sought medical care for her sooner: "High fever. Meningitis. They'd tried to reach him, the women, but he'd been in rehearsal with strict orders not to be interrupted and they hadn't known what to do. When he finally got home there were frantic tears, and then the drive to the hospital, but it was too late, too late." (Atwood 2016: 15). Now, he tries to hide himself behind his theatrical production of *The Tempest*.

Felix also acknowledges his fault in losing his job: "That devious, twisted bastard, Tony, is Felix's own fault. Or mostly his fault. Over the past twelve years, he's often blamed himself." (ibid., p. 11). After assuming the false identity of Mr. Duke and "cobbl[ing] together a fraudulent resumé, forging decades-old letters of reference from several obscure schools" (ibid., p. 48) to get the job in the prison, Felix appears in the role of a teacher. He is successful, because after Felix starts his classes with inmates "[a]stonishingly, their reading and writing scores went up, on average, by fifteen percent." (ibid., p. 54). Despite his teaching success, Felix's darker, manipulative part emerges while staging *The Tempest*. In so far as he is planning his secret plan, Felix plays with the lives and futures of the inmates. They assist him in staging the play and in carrying out his revenge but he puts their future in danger by enlisting them – without their knowledge – in a plot to assault the justice minister. This can be read as the novel's commentary on the social and racial inequality in contemporary Canada: Felix is a white, educated, middle-class male who takes advantage of the vulnerable inmates, who are primarily working-class men and ethnic minorities not unlike Shakespeare's Caliban. As one of the inmates says: "Why should the other ones in this play get a second chance at life, but not him? Why's he have to suffer so much for being what he is? It's like he's, you know, black or Native or something." (ibid., p. 265). This clearly suggests that the novel sees the inmates as being treated as social outcasts, both before and, especially, after incarceration. Nevertheless, Felix does not reflect on the ethical implications of his role as either Prospero (i.e. the colonizer of Caliban's island) or settler director of a Canadian company of racially marginalized "actors". He reflects on the issues of creative responsibility rather than human rights. Like Prospero, Felix is depicted as a mischievous "mage", a diminutive version of a "tyrant and megalomaniac": "I'm the director, and these [casting] choices are mine. […] The theatre isn't a republic, it's a monarchy." (ibid., p. 147). At the same time, though, Felix retains ethical ambiguity in that he, unlike Prospero, understands what it is like to lose a child. This is what makes the scene, where he

convinces his enemy, Sal, that his son has passed away all the more puzzling: ""And where's Freddie?" says Sal. "Is he really dead? I heard him scream. I heard the shot!" "I sympathize," says Felix. "I lost my own daughter, in this late tempest. It's irreparable."" (ibid., p. 235).

Given the ethical ambivalence of Felix's actions, in certain respects he is not unlike Caliban, who otherwise does not have his counterpart in Atwood's novel. *Hag-Seed* serves as a misleading title that appeals to the readers' "horizon of expectations" (Hutcheon 2006: 121) and then subverts it. In *The Tempest*, Caliban, Prospero's slave and the indigenous person of the enchanted island, is given the name "Hag-seed" by Prospero. In this respect, the "knowing audience" (ibid., p. 121) may assume that Atwood's novel is about Caliban. The title sets up the readers' expectations for what they can come across in the novel and serves as the initial frame of interpretation, affecting the readers' reaction and meaning-making. However, because *Hag-Seed* focuses on Felix rather than Caliban, it defies these assumptions. Moreover, the links to the original Shakespearean storyline are subtle. Felix is the Latin name for Atwood's Prospero that has a positive connotation, meaning "happy" or "lucky." The names of the other characters, such as Miranda and Tony (short for Antonio, Prospero's brother), and the core original plot of betrayal, punishment, and restoration are also familiar to the "knowing audience". However, the question arises as to why the other characters, for example, Ferdinand or Caliban are not present. In this, *Hag-Seed* remains sufficiently similar to Shakespeare's source text, yet it also deviates enough from the original storyline to be a stand-alone novel. In an interview for The Guardian, Atwood says: "I called my novel *Hag-Seed*, which is one of the names used by Prospero when he is railing at Caliban, and Caliban is cursing him right back. Why name it after Caliban rather than Prospero? I won't tell you that in advance, but there is a reason."[4] (Atwood 2016). Perhaps this reason is Atwood's intention to blur the line between good and evil, to interpret Prospero's words "This thing of darkness I/Acknowledge mine." (Act 5, Sc. 1, l.l. 330-331) in a way that anyone can equally be Prospero and Caliban at the same time, as one of the inmates in the novel claims:

> *[Prospero] overlooks the good points Caliban's got, such as musical talent. But by the end, Prospero's learning that maybe not everything is somebody else's fault. Plus, he sees that the bad in Caliban is pretty much the same as the bad in him, Prospero. They're both angry, both name-callers, both full of revenge: they're joined at the hip. Caliban is like his bad other self.* (Atwood 2016: 267).

In Atwood's novel, Caliban appears as a much more complex character than it might seem at first glance, and the inmates understand Caliban more than Felix himself does. This is because they can identify themselves with Caliban: "We get him." "Everyone kicks him around but he don't let it

[4] Atwood, 2016, A perfect storm: Margaret Atwood on rewriting Shakespeare's *Tempest*. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/sep/24/margaret-atwoodrewriting-shakespeare-tempest-hagseed.

break him, he says what he thinks." […] "He's mean," […] "Wicked mean! Everyone who's dissing him, he wants to get them back!" (ibid., p. 120).

Another complex and ambivalent character in *Hag-Seed* that requires deeper analysis is Ariel. Felix, much like Prospero, needs some help to implement his plan of revenge, i.e. he needs his Ariel, "the special-effects guy" (ibid., p. 104). Atwood makes an interesting choice by dividing the role of Ariel between her characters: a prisoner, 8Handz, who handles the technical effects and plays Ariel in the prison play, and Estelle, the founder of the Literacy Through Literature program in prison. She operates as an Ariel figure because, as Felix himself states, "It was thanks to her influence that he'd been able to pay for the technical support he needed, and the supplies for making the costumes and props." (ibid., p. 69). Estelle even organizes for Tony and Sal to attend the play performed in prison, thereby reflecting Ariel's role in enabling Prospero's retaliation by causing the tempest that stranded Antonio and Alonso's ship in *The Tempest.* Two Ariels in the novel might have been enough, however, Atwood pays the tribute of "fidelity" to Shakespeare's source text by introducing Miranda's ghost, who might be considered as Ariel as well because she inspires and affects the whole story:

> *Miranda's made a decision: she'll be understudying Ariel — surely he can't raise any objections to that. How clever of her, how perfect! She's found the one part that will let her blend in seamlessly at rehearsals. Only he will be able to see her, from time to time. Only he will hear her. She'll be invisible to every eyeball else.* (ibid., p. 180)

The role of Miranda's ghost as Ariel is emphasized later, when she appeals to show some mercy for Tony and Sal: ""Don't you feel sorry for them?" says 8Handz. All this time Miranda has been hovering behind him — a shadow, a wavering of the light — though she's been silent: there haven't been any lines she's needed to prompt. But now she whispers, I would, sir, were I human." (ibid., p. 231). The "knowing audience" recognizes Shakespeare's line "Mine would, sir, were I human," (Act 5, Sc. 1, l. 26) when Ariel pleads Prospero for empathy for his enemies. Considering that Miranda's ghost is the fruit of Felix's imagination, her role is crucial because, arguably, her plea is the reason why Felix stops torturing Tony and Sal.

The significance of imagination is particularly obvious in theatre, or, even more precisely, imagination is a constitutive part of theatre, which is a hermeneutical process in itself, i.e. texts are written by a playwright, shaped by a director, performed by an actor, and interpreted by a spectator. However, when one's imagination is abused, it can create a tornado of ideas and feelings that pushes one's current reality aside in favor of false possibilities and outcomes. Felix claims that to accomplish the dramatic illusion on stage, the ultimate requirement is the human capacity for imagination: "All you need is a few items: the brain completes the illusion." (Atwood 2016: 165).

Indeed, in his own imagination Felix merges with Prospero and echoes his lines "He can see how it could unfold: Tony and Sal, surrounded by goblins. Herded by them. Menaced by them. Reduced to a quivering jelly. *Hark, they roar*, he thinks. *Let them be hunted soundly. At this hour / lies at my mercy all mine enemies*." (ibid., p. 131, italics in original). By reciting lines from Shakespeare's play, Felix self-consciously plays the role of the magician and views himself as the ousted Duke of Milan. Some inmates-actors demonstrate this confusion of identity as well. For example, WonderBoy by genuinely proposing to Ann-Marie, who plays Shakespeare's Miranda, confuses his true identity with his portrayal of Ferdinand in the play:

> *"He proposed to me," said Anne-Marie.*
> *"He's supposed to do that. It's in the scene," Felix said, keeping neutral.*
> *"No, I mean he really proposed to me," said Anne-Marie. "He said it was love at first sight. I said it was only a play, it wasn't real."* (ibid., p. 153)

It looks like Anne-Marie understands the distinction between the play and reality. However, later, when she meets Frederick while performing the play's live version, she also confuses the play with reality. This is because for Atwood, much like for Shakespeare, illusion and reality have an uncertain relationship, highlighting the idea that characters constantly move "[f]rom the life of theatre to the theatre of life" (ibid., p. 205).

In conclusion, in *Hag-Seed*, Atwood demonstrates how art can blur the lines between reality and illusion, challenge expectations, and function simultaneously as a mask for revenge, a disguise of deceit, a means for self-deception, and a tool for manipulation. In Atwood's novel, as Shakespeare's theatre, nothing is what it seems. In this respect, the characters' ethical ambivalence demonstrates a way in which art can serve as a disguise for what appears to be a pure, noble, or innocent means of expression, concealing something more self-centered and manipulative. Felix employs his mastery of theater and psychological persuasion to dominate his world. In Atwood's adaptation of Shakespeare's original play, the reader's preconceived notions of justice and deceit are thrown into disarray through the fusion of Shakespeare's original play and Atwood's adaptation. The reader is asked to consider whether Felix's actions are or should be deemed ethical and what are the consequences of his manipulations. The following chapter "Art as Revelation in Margaret Atwood's *Hag-Seed*" will discuss the ways in which art reveals the truth and what that truth is.

4. Art as Revelation in Atwood's *Hag-Seed*

Revelation, in the form of a thematic portrayal, is predominantly a motif of self-revelation, redemption, and catharsis, and often a character-revealing turning point in the transformation process. Self-revelation provides the characters an opportunity to confront the past, seek justice, and achieve reconciliation. In *Hag-Seed*, revelation plays a major role in Felix's moral and emotional arc, particularly in transitioning from obsession with vengeance to forgiveness. This chapter explores Atwood's use of the transformative power of art in *Hag-Seed* and the ways in which it reveals the hermeneutic truth about what it means to be in the world.

Felix's relationships with other characters reveal his haughtiness and quick temper before his dismissal: ""Let's make this short, […] My list for today: number one, we need to replace the lighting guy, he's not giving me what I need." (Atwood 2016: 18). As mentioned in the previous chapter, when it comes to art and theatrical performance, Felix is a "tyrant and megalomaniac", who "if criticized, […] might overreact with a surplus of ripe adjectives" (ibid., p. 19). Felix's ability to create art has been the foundation of his entire existence. His goal is to "make the Makeshiweg Festival the standard against which all lesser theatre festivals would be measured" (ibid., p. 12), therefore, his stagings have to be perfect. To achieve this perfection, Felix

> *[...] had pulled together the ablest backup teams he could cajole. He'd hired the best, he'd inspired the best. Or the best he could afford. He'd handpicked the technical gnomes and gremlins, the lighting designers, the sound technicians. He'd headhunted the most admired scenery and costume designers of his day, the ones he could persuade. All of them had to be top of the line, and beyond.* (ibid., p. 12)

The way Felix reacts after Tony informs him that the Board has decided to end his contract because "They feel [Felix is] losing, [his] edge" (ibid., p. 20) and "contact with reality" (ibid., p. 20) illustrates his thinking of himself as a "superstar":

> *Without me, the whole Festival would go up in flames! The donors would flee, the actors would quit, the upscale restaurants and the gift shops and the bed-and-breakfasts would fold, and the town of Makeshiweg would sink back into the obscurity from which he'd been so skillfully plucking it, summer after summer, because what else did it have going for it besides a train-switching yard?* (ibid., p. 19-20)

After the dismissal, Felix feels deceived and betrayed, he blames Tony and Sal. His whole identity is destroyed; he is no longer a theatrical director, a husband, or a father. During his voluntary exile, Felix imagines his deceased daughter at the age, had she survived, she would have been. He reads books to her, eats meals with her, helps with her schoolwork, and teaches her how to play chess. In other words, Felix "engage[s] in this non-reality as if it were real" (ibid., p. 45) in order to escape from grief and sorrow in the wake of his daughter's death: "What to do with such a sorrow? It was like an enormous black cloud boiling up over the horizon. No: it was like a blizzard. No: it was like

nothing he could put into language." (ibid., p. 15). It is worth noticing that after Miranda's death, Felix never senses her presence while being in charge of the Makeshiweg Festival. On the one hand, this highlights Felix's aim to purposefully keep himself occupied all the time in order to avoid facing his loss. On the other hand, this suggests that art offers an escape, even if temporarily, from grief.

However, Miranda is not the only one who takes up Felix's thoughts. He still keeps thinking of "his own personal *Tempest*", imagining his landlords having the roles in the play:

> *For a time, Felix tried to amuse himself by casting Maude as the blue-eyed hag, Sycorax the witch, and Walter as Caliban the semi-human log-hauler and dishwasher, in his own personal Tempest—his Tempest of the headspace—but that didn't last long. None of it fitted: Bert the husband wasn't the devil, and young Crystal, a podgy, stubby child, could not be imagined as the sylph-like Miranda.* (ibid., p. 37)

During the nine years of isolation, stalking Tony on the newspapers and the Internet, even thinking of taking his own life ("He could hang himself. He could blow his brains out. He could drown himself in Lake Huron, which was not that far away." (ibid., p. 41)), Felix realizes that "[h]e required a focus, a purpose", where "[f]irst, he needed to get his *Tempest* back" and "[s]econd, he wanted revenge. He longed for it. He daydreamed about it." (ibid., p. 41). But what is more important, Felix realizes that the way he lives cannot continue: ""This has gone way too far," he told himself sternly. "Snap out of it, Felix. Pull yourself together. Break out of your cell. You need a real-world connection."" (ibid., p. 47). Therefore, he applies for the position of "a teacher in the Literacy Through Literature high school level program at the nearby Fletcher County Correctional Institute", hoping that after "too much time alone with his grief eating away at him…re-engaging with people [..] would ground him" (ibid., p. 48).

Felix's teaching method reveals that "theatre is a powerful educational tool" (ibid., p. 200). This method consists of reading Shakespeare's play with "a crib sheet for the archaic words" (ibid., p. 56), carrying out "an in-depth study of the main characters" (ibid.), allowing the inmates to "rewrite the characters' parts in their own words to make them more contemporary" (ibid., p. 57) and assigning writing tasks that involve "the creation of an afterlife for their character" (ibid.). Felix engages the inmates to "rethink, reframe" (ibid., p. 155) *The Tempest*, thus creating a dialogue between the inmates, Shakespeare, and himself. Through the process of interpretation and adaptation of the play, the inmates and particularly Felix undergo a personal transformation.

At the beginning of the novel, Felix is an arrogant, egoistic perfectionist, considering himself as "*the* Felix Phillips" (ibid., p. 196, italics in original). By the end of the novel, the process of his

transformation reaches the stage where "he no longer rates a *the*" (ibid., italics in original). For example, Felix remembers his behaviour with actors in the past: "If it were an ordinary company in the old days he'd have been yelling at them by now, calling them shit-for-brains, ordering them to reach deep, find the character, torquing their emotions to the breaking point and telling them to use the resulting blood and pain, *use it!*" (ibid., p. 154, italic in original). However, in the present, Felix acknowledges that the inmates "are fragile egos" (ibid.), therefore, he treats them differently: ""You've got the talent," he tells them. […] "You're better than this!" Where's the energy? Where's the spark that will ignite this pile of inert damp wood? What am I doing wrong? Felix frets." (ibid.). Another example is when Felix learns that Anne-Marie, who plays Miranda, is provoking Wonderboy, who plays Ferdinand, to make their romantic scene more authentic:

> *"You're ruthless! That's unethical," he said.*
> *"Don't preach, I learned from the best. Everything for the play, right? That's how you put it twelve years ago. As I recall."*
> *That was then, Felix thought. Would I say it today?* (ibid., p. 184)

Felix's response implies that his objectives have shifted considerably, with fairness now taking precedence over creating the ideal production. In addition, Felix allows other characters to be in the role of the director of his production, which is unimaginable with the "earlier" Felix, who would have taken great offense. By contrast, the "current" Felix does "encourage them to write their own extra material" (ibid., p. 173). Even more astonishing is his reaction to this material: ""It's not my play," says Felix. "It's our play." Does he believe this? Yes. No. Not really. Yes." (ibid., p. 176). All this demonstrates Felix's change from arrogance to empathy, from egoism to compassion. Ironically, Felix's life has always been inseparable from art and theatre, but only at Fletcher has it become obvious that theatre helps him to understand his own humanity.

This understanding leads to the issue of forgiveness in *Hag-Seed*. Felix's *Tempest* is produced and his enemies are punished, however, Felix realizes that "he's been wrong about his *Tempest*, wrong for twelve years. The endgame of his obsession wasn't to bring his Miranda back to life. The endgame was something quite different." (ibid., p. 283). What is this "something quite different"? In Shakespeare's play, Prospero forgives his brother: "For you, most wicked sir, whom to call brother/ Would even infect my mouth, I do forgive/ Thy rankest fault – all of them" (Act 5, Sc. 1, l.l. 130-132). However, in *Hag-Seed*, Felix presents his opponents with a list of demands, such as getting his job as Artistic Director back, five years of funding for the Literacy Through Literature program, and Tony's resignation from the position of Heritage Minister. When Tony refuses to cooperate, thinking that Felix has finally gone mad, Felix threatens to post online the video of "Sal mewing and boohooing in the corner, obviously stoned out of his mind; Sebert's dissolving body speeches; you, Tony, yelling at invisible demons, buzzed to the gills." (Atwood 2016: 234). Felix

claims that "under these conditions I pardon all of you, and we'll let bygones be bygones" (ibid., p. 235). Despite his declarations, however, Felix does not forgive his enemies because he uses blackmail to achieve his goals. If Tony and Sal are not the ones to be forgiven, then who is? Perhaps, it is Felix who has to forgive himself for not having prevented his daughter's death: "Anyway I succeeded," he tells himself. "Or at least I didn't fail." Why does it feel like a letdown? The rarer action is / In virtue than in vengeance, he hears inside his head. It's Miranda. She's prompting him." (ibid., p. 239) Perhaps, all this time Felix has been living with "his remorse, his self-castigation, his endless grief" (ibid., p. 160) and therefore has been seeking to punish himself, rather than Tony and Sal. At the beginning of the novel, Felix does not accept that Miranda is gone: "She couldn't have simply vanished from the universe. He'd refused to believe that." (ibid., p. 15). However, his production of *The Tempest* reveals the truth that for twelve years Felix's wish has been not to "resurrect" Miranda or take revenge on those who wronged him, but to let go of his dearest creation – Miranda's image – and forgive himself, which is what happens at the end of the novel:

> *What has he been thinking—keeping her tethered to him all this time? Forcing her to do his bidding? How selfish he has been! Yes, he loves her: his dear one, his only child. But he knows what she truly wants, and what he owes her.*
> *"To the elements be free," he says to her.*
> *And, finally, she is.* (ibid., p. 283)

Although Atwood's readers see the inmates only from Felix's perspective and rely on his judgement about them, it is possible to see their transformation too. Felix claims that in order to portray a character, actors must "explore their hidden depths" (ibid., p. 131). Acting allows the inmates to explore and process their own experiences and emotions: "He'd [Felix] begun with *Julius Caesar*, continued with *Richard III,* and followed that with *Macbeth*. Power struggles, treacheries, crimes: these subjects were immediately grasped by his students, since in their own ways they were experts in them." (ibid., p. 55). As mentioned in the previous chapter, most inmates identify themselves with Caliban. They view Prospero's treatment of Caliban as a projection of their own experience with social injustice, racism, and inequality. The way Caliban is marginalized and punished in the play symbolizes their own sense of being oppressed or abused by society, which is why, Caliban's character serves as an apt metaphor for the inmates' experiences in *Hag-Seed*. This also reveals the novel's subtle critique of the legacy of settler colonialism in Canada, which "persists into the present in the form of socio-economic inequality, racism and discrimination, and political marginalization of Indigenous communities." (Lowman & Barker 2015: 22). Given their harsh and traumatic personal experiences in Canada, the inmates' acting is unsurprisingly passionate and dramatic: "The performances were a little rough, maybe, but they were heartfelt. Felix wished he could have squeezed half that much emotion out of his professionals, back in the day." (Atwood

2016: 58). Treated as capable artists rather than as mere prisoners, the inmates regain their sense of identity and dignity. They rise above the level of the criminal to that of actor, creator, and collaborator: "Watching the many faces watching their own faces as they pretended to be someone else — Felix found that strangely moving. For once in their lives, they loved themselves." (ibid.). Indeed, when delivering their last assignment, which focuses on the imaginary afterlives of Shakespeare's characters, the inmates reclaim their voices. While these assignments are evaluated submissions, they are also deeply personal reflections of the inmates being creative, intellectual, and emotional individuals. Felix acknowledges this during Leggs', who plays Caliban, presentation, when the audience is "listening intently: they really care what happens to Caliban." (ibid., p. 264). Leggs suggests that Caliban is Prospero's illegitimate son and envisions a future where Caliban becomes a successful musician: "The kid is top billing at all the duke-type concerts. He's got a stage name, he's got a band: HAG-SEED AND THE THINGS OF DARKNESS. He's, like, worldfamous." (ibid., p. 267, capitals in original). Given this interpretation, the inmates not only provide voice to Caliban and a happy ending to his story, but they also defy social stereotypes and recover their sense of autonomy, recognition, and belonging. Another example is when Felix receives a suggestion from SnakeEye, the prisoner who plays Antonio, to alter Act 1, Scene 2 of their *Tempest*. Felix acknowledges that this scene might be boring for the audience; therefore, as SnakeEye proposes, they "do it as a flashback number, only with Antonio telling it." (ibid., p. 155). By replacing Prospero's narrative, SnakeEye's rap song provides a new interpretation of Antonio's actions, which, according to the inmates' vision, are the consequence of Prospero's egoism and irresponsibility. Giving Antonio the power to tell his version of the story highlights the fact that not only does Felix expand the inmates' horizons, but they expand his as well. Considering all this, it is obvious that the inmates are encouraged to creatively engage with Shakespeare's play on multiple levels and use their imagination not only for performing a role but as a means of self-exploration and empowerment.

In hermeneutic terms, imagination nourishes the structure of play by providing a space for reflection. To recall Gadamer: "Imagination naturally has a hermeneutical function and serves the sense for what is questionable. It serves the ability to expose real, productive questions" (Gadamer 1976: 12). By asking "productive questions" about the play, Felix engages the inmates in formulating their own questions. For example, this is how they interpret Ariel's role:

> *"So, before sticking on a label, let's list his qualities. What sort of a creature is he? First, he can be invisible. Second, he can fly. Third, he has superpowers, especially when it comes to thunder, wind, and fire. […] "Fifth: he's not human." […]*
> *"What if he's not even real?" says Red Coyote. "Like, if it's Prospero talking to himself? […] Wasted out of his mind, or maybe he's crazy?"*
> *"Maybe it's, like, a dream he's having," says Shiv.*

> *"Maybe that boat sinks, the one they put him in. So the whole play happens right when he's drowning."* (Atwood 2016: 102)

The ability to ask "productive questions" later on evolves into an idea of creating a musical, devoted to Caliban. As Leggs explains: "Doing that report got us thinking: why shouldn't Caliban have a play to himself?" (ibid., p. 270). The rap song created and presented by the inmates as a part of the future musical offers space for multiple interpretations:

> *Freedom, high-day! High-day, freedom! Freedom, high-day, freedom!*
> *Got outta my cage, now I'm in a rage—*
> *No more dams I'll make for fish,*
> *Nor fetch in firing*
> *At requiring,*
> *Nor scrape trenchering, nor wash dish;*
> *Ain't gonna any more lick your feet*
> *Or walk behind you on the street,*
> *Ain't gonna get on the back of the bus,*
> *And you can give our land right back to us!* (ibid., p. 270)

Felix, as a director, is naturally fascinated. The inmates have joined him in the intertextual play with Shakespeare to the extent where they can envision not only an alternative ending to *The Tempest* but also imagine a whole new story for Caliban. In fact, Caliban is not the only one to gain freedom: by the end of the novel, 8Handz has acquired an early parole, the inmates have reclaimed their voices, Miranda has been released, and Felix has been liberated from his sense of guilt. Insofar as we agree with Felix that prison is "any place or situation that you've been put in against your will, that you don't want to be in, and that you can't get out of." (ibid., p. 114), the inmates' song suggests that all of us are trying to break free from our own prisons — be it guilt, societal injustice, or our past mistakes.

To conclude, Atwood's *Hag-Seed* celebrates the hermeneutic power of art by showing how the novel's characters get transformed through the process of working on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. In rehearsing and producing the play, they gain a new way of looking at their own lives. The actual process of theater-making, which is role-playing and self-reflection, reveals aspects of their identity, aspirations, and past actions that they may have been trying to keep secret. The staging of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* leads to a personal awakening for Felix himself. He realizes that his Shakespearean experience is also an act of forgiving himself. In hermeneutic terms, Atwood's use of theatre as a revelatory medium creates a space within which the source play and its contemporary reinterpretation both become sites in which the issues of art and humanity are opened to discussion. In so doing Atwood's *Hag-Seed* shows that art — through performance and interpretation — can change many facets of one's life in a profound and long-lasting way.

5. Conclusions

This MA paper aimed to analyse the hermeneutic significance of art in Margaret Atwood's adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in her novel *Hag-Seed*. Leaning on Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy, particularly his concepts of play and fusion of horizons, this reading of Atwood's novel examined the ethical implications of how *Hag-Seed* employs theatre as a metaphor for "deception" as well as "revelation". Linda Hutcheon's critical insights into adaptation, as a hermeneutic act in itself, are also employed for this purpose. Read in this light, Atwood's *Hag-Seed* demonstrates how an adaptation can act as a dialogue between historical contexts, using a classic text to explore the ontological truth of human experience. In the novel, the Shakespearean themes of revenge, forgiveness, and the redemptive power of art are not only preserved but also reinterpreted through the terms of contemporary society, such as literal or metaphorical incarceration, trauma, and social marginalization. Given the figural dynamics of recontextualization through which the novel plays out the fusion of different historical and interpretative horizons, *Hag-Seed* demonstrates that despite the changing circumstances, humanity's inner conflicts—their desires, flaws, and potentialities for transformation—are persistent and deeply resonant.

As it has been demonstrated in this MA paper, the novel's protagonist, theatre director Felix Phillips, engages in two forms of deception: he lies to others to fulfill his plan of revenge, and deceives himself by imagining his deceased daughter is still alive. Felix uses theatre as a mask and means for his revenge against the people who wronged him. His interactive version of *The Tempest* becomes a form of deception because Felix manipulates the inmates-actors and his audience into participating in his scheme without their knowledge. By turning revenge into a work of art, the narrative of the novel blurs the lines between artistic illusion and reality, highlighting how art can be used to deceive and control. For Atwood, much like for Shakespeare, artistic illusion has an actual impact on one's identity because it takes hold of one's imagination. This impact on identity, or more precisely, the confusion of identities is obvious with Felix, who, by reciting lines from Shakespeare's play, self-consciously embodies the role of the magician and views himself as the ousted Duke of Milan. Similarly, the inmates-actors, who are continually switching between their actual circumstances and the characters they play, appear to be stranded somewhere between the Shakespearean island and their Canadian prison. The two worlds interact: the Shakespearean roles influence the inmates' actual feelings and actions, and vice versa.

In hermeneutic terms, Atwood's *Hag-Seed* not only revives but also redefines Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, shedding light on the power of art to mediate human conflict, develop empathy, and inspire transformation. Felix's journey of self-discovery and personal transformation, which unfolds

through his relationship with Shakespeare's play and the inmates' interpretation of this text, emphasizes the hermeneutic role of empathy in reading, acting and living. Through the act of interpreting, adapting, and performing *The Tempest*, the significance of forgiveness, particularly self-forgiveness, and reconciliation is revealed. Arguably, in *Hag-Seed*, theatre refers not only to performers playing dramatic parts on stage, but also to the presentation of one's character in real life. Acting enables the novel's characters to explore and reveal their inner depths, as well as to reclaim the marginalized and silenced voices.

This MA paper argues that the main focus of Atwood's *Hag-Seed* is the transformative power of art, however, future readings may also consider aspects which have not been explored here, for example, the role of literature in prison or the teaching strategies depicted in the novel.

Summary in Lithuanian

Audra už grotų: menas kaip revanšas Margaret Atwood romane “Hag-Seed”

Šiame baigiamajame magistro darbe nagrinėjamas Kanados rašytojos Margaret Atwood romanas “Hag-Seed”. Atwood yra žinoma rašytoja, poetė, literatūros kritikė bei visuomenės veikėja, pelniusi įvairius pasaulio literatūros apdovanojimus. Jos kūryba apima įvairius žanrus ir temas, tokias kaip lyčių santykiai, patriarchalinė visuomenė, klimato kaita ir ateities prognozės. Romanas “Hag-Seed” – tai Williamo Shakespeare‘o pjesės “Audra” adaptacija, pasakojanti apie teatro režisierių, sielvartaujantį dėl prarastos šeimos bei trokštantį atkeršyti savo priešams, dėl kurių sąmokslo neteko darbo. Šiame magistro darbe siekiama išanalizuoti santykį tarp Shakespeare’o „Audros“ ir Atwood „Hag-Seed“, nagrinėjant, kaip Atwood romanas transformuoja Shakespeare’o tekstą, kartu spręsdamas šiuolaikines socialines ir kultūrines problemas. Pasitelkiant Hans-Georg Gadamerio hermeneutikos filosofiją ir Lindos Hutcheon įžvalgas apie meno kūrinių adaptaciją, šiame darbe Atwood romanas yra nagrinėjamas kaip skirtingų laikinių, kultūrinių ir individualių kontekstų sąveikos procesas. Tokiu būdu yra atskleidžiama kūrybinė meno (ypatingai teatro) prigimtis bei transformatyvioji galia, ir „apgaulės“ ir „atverties“ tropų etinės implikacijos. Darbe siekiama išaiškinti, kaip romanas sukuria intersubjektyvius santykius, kuriuose meno transformacinis potencialas yra įgalinamas per skaitytojo interpretacinę patirtį. Akcentuojant tai, kad meno kūrinio supratimas yra dinamiškas procesas, kurį lemia praeities ir dabarties, menininko ir auditorijos sąveika, šiame darbe teigiama, kad Atwood romanas, permąstydamas Shakespeare’o pjesės reikšmę šiuolaikiniame kontekste, parodo, kaip meno perteikiamos tiesos pranoksta konkretaus kūrino istorines ribas ir transformuoja skaitytojų supratimo akiračius.

Raktiniai žodžiai: Margaret Atwood; Shakespeare; adaptacija; teatras; hermeneutika.

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