Hag-Seed

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MARGARET ATWOOD

The second of three children, Margaret Atwood was born in 1939 in Ottawa. Because her father was an entomologist frequently conducting field research, Atwood spent much of her childhood in the wilderness of Quebec, only attending school sporadically (an unusual lifestyle that reemerges in her novel *Cat's Eye*). However, she became an avid reader at a young age, and by her teenage years, she was determined to become a professional writer. After graduating from the University of Toronto in 1961, Atwood published some collections of poetry, followed by her first novel, *The Edible Woman*. Throughout the next decades Atwood taught writing at various Canadian universities, while writing prolifically and becoming widely acclaimed. Today, she's published sixteen novels, seventeen collections of poetry, as well as collections of essays, short stories, and children's books. She's best-known for her 1985 novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, which envisions a dystopian misogynist regime taking over America, and which has been adapted into a successful television series. Atwood's partner since the 1970s is Canadian novelist Graeme Gibson; the couple have one daughter, Eleanor Gibson.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Tempest was probably written around 1610-1611, in an era when the English were beginning to expand their colonial presence in continents outside Europe—English settlers had arrived in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607, and Dutch traders would bring the first cargo of African slaves there in 1619. In its depiction of a powerful European who takes over an island and subjugates its inhabitants, the play reflects the fantastic and often exoticized tales of unfamiliar places and people that were filtering into British society, as well as contemporary anxiety about England's new role in the world and different views on the morality of colonialism. Atwood chooses to set her version of *The Tempest* in a modern prison, creating a link between the mass incarceration that prevails in North America today, disproportionately targeting minority communities, and the colonialist regimes that have oppressed those minorities for centuries. She thus uses Shakespeare's work to explore the consequences of the worldwide phenomenon whose beginning Shakespeare himself witnessed.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Hag-Seed is based on *The Tempest*, one of William Shakespeare's last and most iconic plays. Most scholars agree that the play's protagonist, a wizard named Prospero who controls the destinies of those around him, is a metaphor for the role of the playwright in creating the world of theater; because Shakespeare left no personal writings and little is known about the actual circumstances in his life, the play provides one of the only windows into his conception of himself and his art. *The Tempest* has inspired many subsequent works of literature. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* derives its title from a line in *The Tempest*, and casts its protagonist as a social outcast much like Caliban. Rachel Ingalls's 1982 novel *Mrs. Caliban* describes a housewife who escapes from her stifling life by falling in love with a "monstrous" creature whom she may or may not have invented. In the postcolonial period, some Caribbean writers have used the figure of Caliban to meditate on colonial oppression and its presentation in literature: for example, playwright Aimé Césaire's play *A Tempest* reimagines Caliban as a black Haitian slave in revolt against his master, Prospero.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Hag-Seed*
- **When Written:** 2016
- **Where Written:** Canada
- **When Published:** 2016
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Novel
- **Setting:** Ontario, Canada
- **Climax:** Felix's kidnapping of Tony and Sebert during his production of *The Tempest*
- **Antagonist:** Tony
- **Point of View:** Third-person limited

EXTRA CREDIT

Dirty Words. The novel's title, Hag-Seed, is in fact a curse word in the original play. Prospero uses the phrase to deride Caliban, calling him the son (seed) of a witch (hag).

Retellings. Atwood's novel derives from Shakespeare's play, but he himself likely based the narrative on various poems and reports of colonial exploration that were available to him.

PLOT SUMMARY

The novel begins with a prologue in the form of a script. A large screen announces that the Fletcher Correctional Players will be performing *The Tempest*, and soon the play commences. However, just a few lines into the first scene, the action stops

and the room goes pitch black. Shots are heard outside, and the audience is frightened. An unfamiliar voice warns them to stay still and stop talking.

In a series of flashbacks, Felix Phillips recalls the events that brought him to his current job teaching theater at the Fletcher Correctional Center, a local **prison**. Twelve years ago, he was the esteemed Artistic Director of one of Canada's most prominent theater festivals. He's a professional success, but his life is marred by the deaths of his wife Nadia, who died of an infection after giving birth, and of their daughter Miranda, who caught meningitis three years later. Still in mourning for his toddler daughter, Felix devotes himself to a spectacular production of *The Tempest*; Miranda is named after one if its characters and he hopes that staging the play will be a "reincarnation" for her. However, at this point Felix's assistant Tony Price, who for years has done all the thankless logistical work necessary to fund and operate the festival, reveals a nasty surprise: the Festival's board has decided to fire Felix, citing mental instability after his recent bereavement, and replace him with Tony himself. Tony claims that he wasn't involved in the decision, but Felix knows he orchestrated the whole thing.

Without his career and his family, Felix is completely adrift; driving through the Ontario countryside after leaving the festival for good, he spots a tiny wooden cottage built into the side of a hill. He decides that he will move here to retreat from the world and avoid letting others witness the spectacle of his professional downfall. He arranges to rent the cottage from Maude, its surly owner, and completely disappears from his old life. He even creates a new name for himself—F. Duke—which he uses to introduce himself to Maude and open a P.O. box and a new bank account.

For years Felix lies low in the cottage, marinating in his resentment of Tony and grief for Miranda. He tries to develop hobbies but can't interest himself in anything outside the world of theater. His favorite amusement is using the Internet to stalk Tony, who eventually leaves the theater and rises through the ranks of provincial politics.

In his loneliness, Felix begins to imagine that the deceased Miranda is visiting him and keeping him company. At first she appears as a young girl, and Felix takes care of her by "helping" her learn her multiplication tables and reading children's books out loud. Over the years she seems to become a teenager, and "forces" Felix to remember to eat and cook healthy meals. On an intellectual level Felix knows this is a fantasy, but that doesn't make his delusions less real. When one day he truly seems to hear Miranda singing outside, he tells himself that he needs to make a change in his life.

Accordingly, Felix answers a job listing for a teacher in the Literacy Through Literature program at the local prison. The program's coordinator, Estelle, interviews him and immediately deduces who he is; full of admiration for his past work, she gives him the job and agrees not to tell anyone his real identity.

In turn, Felix insists on changing the course to fit his own interests: he's not going to teach short stories or novels, but will stage one Shakespeare play each year. Estelle doesn't believe he'll be able to accomplish this with a cast of prisoners, some of whom can barely read, but she allows him to try.

Although it's hard at first, Felix develops a popular and successful program at the prison. He teaches each play the same way: first he and his students analyze the main themes together and discuss the backstory and motivation of each character. Then Felix casts the play and directs the production, which is eventually filmed and shown to the entire prison via TV. He insists that his students interact with and respect the original text, but he also allows them to rewrite and modernize certain parts, and gives them a lot of leeway regarding **costumes**, sets, and special effects. He always chooses political dramas like *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth*; the prisoners identify with and are interested in the intrigue and backstabbing that the plays contain.

Just before Felix is about to start the fourth iteration of his course, Estelle informs him that this year, two government Ministers are going to come to the prison and view the final production; one of them is Tony and the other is Sal O'Nally, an older man who helped Felix's nemesis get his start in politics. Funding for the program has been under threat for months, but Estelle hopes that a successful visit will convince the politicians of its importance. Suddenly feeling that his revenge is at hand, Felix impulsively tells her that this year's play will be *The Tempest*—news which disconcerts Estelle, since as a romance it's far less likely to generate enthusiasm among the prisoners.

At first, she's right—everyone is disappointed that there are no fight scenes in *The Tempest* and no one wants to play Ariel, an un-masculine fairy-like spirit, or Miranda, a young girl. However, Felix gradually wins them around by convincing them that Ariel is more like a superhero than a fairy and, more excitingly, promising to hire a real woman to play Miranda. The actress he eventually tracks down is Anne-Marie Greenland, whom he had planned to cast as Miranda in his original, aborted production of *The Tempest*; now she's a struggling actress and dancer who's initially suspicious at the idea of participating in a prison production but eventually succumbs to Felix's enthusiasm. He's also interested to find that Caliban, the play's villain, is very popular among the prisoners, who identify with his poverty and oppression at Prospero's hands.

Felix has a plan for using the production to achieve his personal revenge against Tony and Sal, but he's not sure if it can succeed, or if he has the courage to try it. Rehearsals go poorly at first, but with Felix's determination—as well as Anne-Marie's increasing involvement and help with choreography—they improve. The prisoners write innovative raps from the perspective of Caliban and Antonio. Meanwhile, the ghostly Miranda reads Felix's copy of the script and becomes fascinated with the play; although she's angry when Felix

explains she can't play the heroine, she eventually agrees to "understudy" Ariel's part and accompanies Felix to rehearsal, saying the lines in his ear.

One day, Estelle summons Felix to lunch to confide a rumor that Sal and Tony are going to cancel the literacy program after seeing the play, in a bid to seem tough and frugal to their constituents. Estelle is furious but Felix, finally committing to his plan, tells her that he knows a way to save the program. She agrees to help in any way she can.

The day of the performance arrives. Sal and Tony arrive, feeling complacent and bored; they don't care about impressing the prisoners, who can't vote. They're accompanied by Lonnie Gordon, once the chair of the Makeshiweg Festival Board, now a local political fundraiser; Sebert Stanley, another politician who's preparing to run against Sal in an upcoming election; and Frederick O'Nally, Sal's son and an aspiring but so far unsuccessful director. They enter the prison, where actors in pirate costumes give them ginger ale in glasses marked specifically for each man. As described in the prologue, the play begins and then quickly stops. The men conclude that a prison riot is happening. Unseen men grab Frederick and take him away, to Sal's distress.

Soon, more men march the politicians to another cell, where they are left alone. Sal and Lonnie fall asleep, knocked out by their spiked soda. Tony and Sebert begin to discuss the election. Tony, who is ready to jettison Sal and throw in his lot with Sebert, suggests that they kill Sal and Lonnie and blame their deaths on the prisoners. Meanwhile, in another room Anne-Marie, dressed as Miranda, comforts the confused and worried Frederick. She tells him that a crazy man who thinks he's Prospero is playing some kind of prank, and that Frederick needs to read out all his monologues to appease him. Taking the script, Frederick starts declaiming Ferdinand's love speeches to Miranda.

A sudden clap of thunder wakes Sal and Lonnie up and the cell's door opens; music lures the politicians down the hall and into another room, where a bowl of grapes is waiting. Sal, Sebert, and Tony eat the grapes, which Felix has injected with psychedelic drugs; soon they are all writhing on the floor, gripped by a bad trip.

When the effects of the drugs are finally subsiding, Felix—who has orchestrated the entire spectacle with the aid of his special effects guru, a prisoner called 8Handz—makes his grand appearance to the men, who are shocked and horrified to find themselves at the mercy of the man they once ousted from his job. Felix reveals that he has recorded their drug-induced craze, as well as Tony's treacherous conversation, and presents them with a list of demands: everyone has to apologize for their behavior, they must give Felix his own job back, and Tony and Sebert must withdraw from politics. Reluctantly, they agree. Felix allows Sal to reunite with Frederick, who announces that he's fallen in love with Anne-Marie. Soon, everyone leaves the classroom wing to attend a small party with the Warden and the prison officials; no one says a word about what has just happened.

Some days after the rogue play, Felix holds a cast party for the prisoners, in which he distributes contraband cigarettes as a reward for their work. At this point, groups of prisoners present reports on the "afterlives" of different characters—what they think happens to them after the end of the play. Everyone debates whether Prospero, restored to his dukedom, will manage to keep his power this time, or if he will be foiled by Antonio once again.

Now that the play is over and Felix has finally achieved his revenge, he's liberated to make some changes in his own life as well. He has his old job back, but rather than trying to rack up more directorial achievements he focuses on training Frederick and Anne-Marie, who are now dating and whom he is grooming to eventually take over the festival. For his own part, he's agreed to accompany Estelle on a cruise to the Caribbean. He doesn't even have to pay his ticket, as long as he gives some lectures on his prison work to the other passengers; he's also arranged to take 8Handz, who has received early parole, with them. Dominated by his feelings of loss, Felix has always been resistant to the idea of a romance with Estelle; now, he's beginning to reconsider.

As he's packing up his few possessions, Felix looks at the photograph of three-year-old Miranda he's always kept on his night stand. He realizes that conjuring up her presence all these years doesn't preserve her spirit but traps them both in a haze of grief. He tells her that it's time to "be free," and he feels that she is.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Felix Phillips / Mr. Duke – The novel's protagonist, a director who takes a job teaching Shakespeare at a local **prison** after being ousted from his position as head of a prominent theater festival. Felix is at once a theatrical genius and a lonely and aging man; he struggles to reconcile these two personas, even creating a new name for himself—Mr. Duke—after losing his job, and hiding his true identity from everyone at the prison. For much of the novel Felix is motivated primarily by feelings of grief and resentment, which he expresses through a production of *The Tempest* he mounts at the prison. He uses the production to lure the politicians who once fired him, Tony Price and Sal O'Nally, to the prison and exact his revenge. At the same time, by focusing on the father-daughter relationship between the play's two main characters, Prospero and Miranda, he hopes to revive his own daughter Miranda, who died twelve years ago but whose ghostly presence he often hallucinates visiting him. His obsessive pursuit of these goals often makes Felix self-

centered, but he also does a lot of good to others along the way. In the prison he is a dedicated teacher, and the program he devises proves both educational and therapeutic for the prisoners. He also takes a lonely and struggling actress, Anne-Marie Greenland, under his wing, mentoring her and eventually throwing her together with Frederick O'Nally, who becomes her boyfriend. By the end of the novel Felix has vanquished his enemies and returned to power as director of the theater festival, but he's no longer so concerned with his own personal gain, and triumphs chiefly in the benefits his revenge has brought to those around him. While he never overcomes his grief for Miranda, he manages to accept her death, a step which allows him to embark on a new (potential) relationship with his colleague, Estelle. Felix corresponds to Prospero, the Duke of Milan and protagonist of *The Tempest*.

Tony Price – Felix's one-time assistant and current nemesis, the novel's most irredeemable villain. After years of being left to deal with the logistical aspects of the Makeshiweg Festival while Felix concentrates on his spectacular productions, Tony convinces the festival's Board to fire Felix and hire *him* as Artistic Director. However, Tony has no genuine interest in theater and only uses the position as a springboard to political power; when he meets Felix again twelve years later he's a seedy provincial politician whose persona as a virtuous public servant conceals the fact that he uses his power exclusively for his own gain. By capturing Tony during his production of *The Tempest* and recording him as he muses about murdering Sal and Lonnie, Felix is able to unmask him and end his career, thus achieving his personal revenge and performing a public service at the same time. Tony corresponds to the character Antonio in *The Tempest*.

Miranda – Felix's daughter, who dies at the age of three, just before Felix is fired from his position at the festival, in a sudden attack of meningitis. Although Felix was often a distracted caregiver, leaving Miranda with nannies while he planned and rehearsed his plays, he's also a devoted father, enthralled by his daughter's every action and proud of her ability to sit quietly in a crowded theater, seeming to take in the plays despite her age. Some years after her death, Felix begins to imagine that Miranda is visiting him as a spirit; although it's never clear how seriously he takes these delusions, the ghostly Miranda begins to keep him company in his cabin every day, growing over the years from a young child into a sensitive but mature teenager. In some ways, her "existence" keeps Felix from going insane from grief and loneliness; he remembers to eat because he thinks he needs to feed her, and the idea that he's taking care of her gives him a sense of purpose. On the other hand, his obsession with her and inability to confess his imaginations to anyone else keeps him from overcoming his grief and forming meaningful new relationships. The ghostly Miranda takes a strong interest in Felix's staging of *The Tempest*, even learning Ariel's part and whispering the lines in Felix's ear. However, by the end of his production Felix realizes that by conjuring up Miranda's presence he's not preserving his daughter but rather trapping her and himself. Just as Prospero released Ariel, his spirit helper, at the end of the play, Felix releases the ghost of Miranda in order to start a new life. Miranda corresponds to the characters Miranda and Ariel in *The Tempest*.

Anne-Marie Greenland – A struggling actress who plays Miranda in the Fletcher Correctional Players' production of *The Tempest*. Twelve years earlier, Felix had enlisted the teenaged Anne-Marie to play Miranda in the production he was planning at the Makeshiweg Festival; Tony's coup then not only ousted Felix but also cut short the young woman's blossoming career. Talented and enthusiastic about choreography and dance as well as acting, Anne-Marie brings her expertise to the production, becoming as dedicated as Felix and encouraging the prisoners to add innovative additions to their parts. With her tough, no-nonsense personality, she also adds some grit and confidence to the character of Miranda, whom Felix originally imagines as fragile and vulnerable. While Felix is exacting his revenge on Tony and Sal during their visit to the **prison**, Anne-Marie has to distract Sal's son, Frederick; just as Felix hopes, the two young people fall in love in the process. By the end of the novel Felix has hired them both to work at the Makeshiweg Festival and eventually take it over. In both the part she plays and the affectionate relationship she develops with Felix, Anne-Marie corresponds to the character Miranda in *The Tempest*.

Estelle – Felix's supervisor in his job at the prison, a well-connected professor and pioneer of the Literacy Through Literature program. A stylish and vivacious woman, Estelle is passionate about **prison** education and uses the connections she's inherited from her political family to secure funding and support for initiatives in Fletcher Correctional Center. She also takes a personal interest in Felix; the only person to guess his real identity after he takes on the name Mr. Duke, she's impressed by his background and mysterious air, and flattered to be his main confidante. It's Estelle who brings Felix the news that Tony and Sal are visiting the prison and, motivated by her attachment to him and desire to save the theater program, assists him in his daring plan for revenge. Felix often compares her to a star or describes her as "shining" or "twinkling," creating a comparison between her and *The Tempest's* Ariel, an elemental spirit who provides Prospero with magical assistance. Unwilling to give up his obsession with the imaginary Miranda, Felix resists a personal friendship with Estelle for most of the novel; however, at the end they embark on a cruise together, signaling a new era in their relationship.

8Handz – One of the prisoners in Felix's acting troupe, a young and intelligent man arrested for hacking. A genius with technology and special effects, 8Handz becomes Felix's chief assistant, as well as playing Ariel in the **prison**'s production of *The Tempest*. He facilitates the rogue production of *The Tempest*

by setting up clandestine audio and video feeds in the prison and catching Sal and Tony's drug-induced hysteria on camera. In return, Felix secures his early parole and takes the young man under his wing after he leaves prison. In his ability to create illusions that seem magical and manipulate the actions of other people, 8Handz corresponds to the character Ariel, Prospero's magical assistant in *The Tempest*.

Leggs – One of the most talented and outgoing prisoners in Felix's acting troupe, Leggs is eventually chosen to play Caliban. A mixed-race veteran of the war in Afghanistan, Leggs is incarcerated because he turned to robbery and theft after the government failed to provide adequate PTSD treatment on his return from war. Leggs composes one of the most memorable parts of the prisoners' play, a rap from Caliban's perspective in which the villain triumphantly announces his freedom and identifies himself with marginalized communities of all kinds. Through his backstory and the art that he creates, Leggs suggests that people considered villainous and unacceptable by society—from the character of Caliban to the prisoners at **Fletcher Correctional Center** – are often pushed into these roles by the oppressive circumstances in which they live.

WonderBoy – One of the prisoners in Felix's acting troupe, eventually selected to play Ferdinand. A handsome and charming young man, WonderBoy has been incarcerated after selling fake life insurance to credulous senior citizens. While Felix admires his ability to project false illusions, he doesn't trust him. WonderBoy briefly falls in love with Anne-Marie while filming their scenes together, but eventually accepts her relationship with Frederick O'Nally.

Red Coyote – One of the prisoners in Felix's acting troupe, eventually selected to play Stephano, one of Antonio's unscrupulous servants. A Native Canadian, Red Coyote has been incarcerated for drug dealing. From the start of the class he sympathizes with Caliban, pointing out that the play's "villain" is actually the rightful owner of the island, enslaved by Prospero. In his arguments, Red Coyote evokes the postcolonial interpretations of *The Tempest*, which focus on Caliban's role as an oppressed and marginalized voice.

Lonnie Gordon – The head of the Makeshiweg Festival's Board of Directors, a naïve but goodhearted old man. Felix often disdains Lonnie because he's so boring and pompous; however, the elderly man is one of the only people who displays sincere kindness to him, attending Nadia and Miranda's funerals and commiserating with him after Tony's coup. Twelve years later, Lonnie accompanies Tony and Sal on their ill-fated visit to the **prison**, having become a local fundraiser for their political party. Lonnie is taken hostage with the rest of the men but, mindful of his innocence, Felix prevents him from eating the drugged grapes and keeps him safe from harm. Lonnie is a reminder that it's often disregarded people without power or influence who prove the most loyal and kind. He corresponds to the character Gonzalo in *The Tempest*.

Sal O'Nally – One of Felix's nemeses and a provincial politician, first Minister of Heritage and later Minister of Justice. Having disliked Felix since they attended high school together and fought frequently, Sal assists Tony with his coup and later takes the other man under his wing as a fledgling politician. Like Tony, he's often more concerned with his own profit than the public good—for example, he plans to cancel the prison's theater program simply in order to appear "tough on crime" to his constituents. However, he's differentiated from Tony by his sincere love for his son, Frederick; he also becomes more sympathetic when Tony plots to kill him while they're held captive in the **prison**. By the end of the novel Sal has apologized for his behavior and seems to have reformed himself somewhat. He corresponds to the character Alonso in *The Tempest*, the King of Naples and father of Ferdinand.

Maude – Felix's landlady when he moves to the rural cottage. A brusque but discreet woman, she protects Felix's privacy and provides him with electricity and wood for his stove in exchange for punctual rent payments. At the end of the novel, she and her family suddenly abandon the area, just as Felix is thinking about moving out of the cottage. Felix often compares her to one of the elemental spirits in *The Tempest*, who exist only so long as the protagonist, Prospero, needs them.

Sebert Stanley – An intelligent minor politician who moves in Sal and Tony's orbit and accompanies them on their visit to the **prison**. Like the other two, he's presented as sleazy and unconcerned with the public good. At the time of their visit, Sebert is preparing to run against Sal for a leadership position; while they're held captive by the prisoners, he plots with Tony to kill Sal and frame the prisoners, thus paving the way for his rise to power. It's this conversation that Felix ultimately uses to blackmail Sebert into dropping out of the race altogether. He corresponds to the character Sebastian in *The Tempest*.

Frederick O'Nally – Sal O'Nally's son, an aspiring but struggling thespian who accompanies his father and the other politicians on their visit to the **prison**. When Felix first hears about him from Estelle, Frederick seems like a spoiled brat, only able to make it into theater schools with help from his politician father. However, Frederick turns out to be an unassuming and genuinely motivated young man—and perhaps more importantly to Felix, he admires the older director's work. Felix uses his rogue production of *The Tempest* to throw together Frederick and Anne-Marie, who embark on a relationship by the end of the novel. After his return to power, Felix also gives Frederick a job at the Makeshiweg Festival, jumpstarting the young man's career. Frederick corresponds to the character Ferdinand in *The Tempest*.

Bent Pencil – One of the prisoners in Felix's acting troupe, eventually selected to play Gonzalo. He's an accountant incarcerated after embezzling from his clients. Although he's often pompous in his behavior, he's also gentle and kind; the prisoners respect him and hope that he can help them once

they're on the outside. Of all the prisoners, he most resembles the character whose role he takes on in the play.

SnakeEye – One of the prisoners in Felix's acting troupe, eventually selected to play Antonio, the villain. Convicted of running real estate scams and a small Ponzi scheme, SnakeEye is unrepentant of his crimes and see his victims as stupid people who deserve to be tricked—much as, in the play, Antonio feels that Prospero deserves to be deposed. He's played the villain in almost every play Felix has staged, and even the director is a little intimidated by him.

Nadia – Felix's wife, who dies of a sudden infection shortly after giving birth to their daughter, Miranda. Dead by the time the novel begins, she appears only in Felix's memories as a kind and gentle woman. After her death, Felix gives up on his hopes for a family and domestic happiness.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Krampus – One of the prisoners in Felix's acting troupe, eventually selected to play Alonso. He's a Mennonite who has been convicted of participating in a Mennonite crime ring that smuggled drugs hidden in farm equipment from Mexico to Canada.

Phil the Pill – One of the prisoners in Felix's acting troupe, eventually selected to play Sebastian. He's a middle-aged doctor, incarcerated after prescribing opioids to college students who eventually overdosed and died. Like his character in the production, he's a little gullible and easy to manipulate.

TimEEz – One of the prisoners in Felix's acting troupe, eventually selected to play Trinculo. He's been convicted of shoplifting, and is most notable for his critical role in divesting Tony and Sal of their security pagers during the play, thus preventing them from calling for the guards.

Shiv – One of the prisoners in Felix's acting troupe. A former gang enforcer, he plays the Announcer, a part Felix adds to the play in order to summarize each scene and facilitate audience comprehension.

PPod – One of the prisoners in Felix's acting troupe. A former gang member, he plays the Boatswain, a minor character who appears during the shipwreck at the beginning of the play.

Riceball – One of the prisoners in Felix's acting troupe. He plays a goblin, one of the magical creatures that do Prospero's dirty work. In the **prison** production, this means he's one of the people manhandling and restraining the visiting politicians.

Col.Deth – One of the prisoners in Felix's acting troupe. He plays a goblin, one of the magical creatures that do Prospero's dirty work. In the **prison** production, this means he's one of the people manhandling and restraining the visiting politicians.

VaMoose – One of the prisoners in Felix's acting troupe. He plays a goblin, one of the magical creatures that do Prospero's dirty work. In the **prison** production, this means he's one of the people manhandling and restraining the visiting politicians.

Bert – Maude's husband, a truck driver who brings Felix wood for his stove and plows the dirt path to his house.

Crystal – Maude and Bert's young daughter.

Walter – Maude and Bert's teenage son.

Dylan – One of the guards at **Fletcher Correctional Center**, generally friendly to Felix and interested in his work. He usually appears with his colleague, Madison.

Madison – One of the guards at **Fletcher Correctional Center**, generally friendly to Felix and interested in his work. He usually appears with his colleague, Dylan.

The Warden – The official in charge of the **prison**. He's occasionally referenced but never actually appears in the novel.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

THEATER AND THE TEMPEST

A retelling of Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, Margaret Atwood's *Hag-Seed* tells the story of a director named Felix who, after being ousted from his job at a prominent theater festival, begins teaching Shakespeare in a **prison**, eventually using his new position to get back at his old enemies. Both novel and play center around a protagonist who does his best to control the direction of the plot and the actions of those around him. In this sense, Shakespeare's Prospero—who uses his magic powers to exact revenge on his enemies—and Atwood's Felix—whose craftiness as a thespian allows him to achieve his own vengeance—represent the playwright or author who inevitably controls his or her creative work. Both works use their powerful protagonists to contrast the inherently contrived nature of theater with its ability to reflect and influence real life. However, while Shakespeare seems to use Prospero to meditate uneasily on his own long career as a playwright, Atwood ultimately uses this contradiction to argue for the moral utility of theater and the importance of prioritizing it within a society.

Often seeming to control the actions of those around them, both Prospero and Felix are like playwrights controlling the theater of their own lives; their outsized power points out the artificiality lurking in even the most realistic theatrical productions. In *The Tempest*, Prospero is a wizard who uses his magic powers to bring about the outcomes that he wants. He causes a storm that strands his nemeses, Antonio and

Sebastian, on his island, and he leads them to start plotting against each other, making them powerless against him and eventually forcing them to apologize. He even engineers the romance between his daughter, Miranda, and Sebastian's son Ferdinand.

Felix obviously has no supernatural powers, but his creative genius makes him equal to Prospero in manipulating those around him (reincarnating him as an actual thespian, Atwood strengthens the link between the powerful protagonist and the world of theater). He flirts with Estelle, the prison advocate who hires him, in order to get special favors and stage his subversive version of *The Tempest*; he also convinces the prisoners to turn the play into a sly revolt, never telling them that the politicians they're "kidnapping" are his personal enemies. Like Prospero, he throws together his protégé Anne-Marie and the young thespian (and son of Felix's enemy) Frederick, prompting them to fall in love.

In both cases, the protagonists' ability and desire to manipulate the action of the plot affects their relationships with those around them. Prospero frequently emerges as unlikeable, more interested in getting the better of others than taking care of those he loves, like his daughter Miranda; he triumphs in humbling his brother, Antonio, even though he can't make him understand his wrongdoing or reconcile with him. Similarly, Felix's obsession with his own plots makes him feel distant even from people he genuinely likes, like Anne-Marie or Estelle. The "plays" that the men stage in their respective worlds make them unable to feel natural in their own lives.

Despite their seemingly unnatural character, the theatrical revenges staged by Prospero and Felix both reflect and improve real life. In both cases, the protagonists expose and punish the villainy of those around them, which—especially in *Hag-Seed*—is presented as a social service. Atwood presents Tony Price and Sal O'Nally, Felix's enemies, as greedy and selfish politicians. The prison's production of *The Tempest* reveals the murderous impulses that have always been lurking behind their masquerade as virtuous public servants; by removing them from political power, Felix benefits their constituents.

Just like Miranda and Ferdinand in *The Tempest*, Anne-Marie and Frederick emerge as deeply compatible lovers, whose relationship is marked by "joy" and "enthusiasm" and rescues them both from loneliness and insecurity. Although the relationship is arranged by Felix, who has become a father-figure to Anne-Marie, and relies on the outright deception of Frederick, it proves one of the most positive developments at the end of the novel.

Just as importantly, Atwood adds another dimension to the interaction between theater and real life through the plays that Felix helps the prisoners stage. Working through violent political dramas like *Julius Caesar* or *Macbeth*, the prisoners are able to address the violence in their own pasts and come to terms with their incarceration. Even though prison officials doubt that they will be able to relate to "classic" works like Shakespeare, the prisoners see his plays as closely linked to the circumstances of their actual lives.

To the very end of *The Tempest*, Shakespeare seems uneasy about these contradictions in the nature of theater; however, Atwood chooses to focus on theater's utility in the real world, arguing that it is an important social good. Most scholars concur that Shakespeare intended Prospero to represent himself; this is especially important because Prospero remains isolated and somewhat unhappy even in his triumph, saying that all his magic powers are gone and his own strength is "most faint." This seems to suggest that genius in the world of theater is inherently false, not reflective on one's character in real life. At the end of his monologue, he implores the audience to "set me free"; while he's able to manipulate everyone within the world of the play, he feels powerless before the people who view it.

By contrast, Atwood's prisoners have grown through contact with the world of theater, and seem primed for successful reentry into society. Additionally, Felix has arrived at a new stage of fulfillment and tranquility with his staging of *The Tempest*. In this narrative, it's the people who see theater as artificial and unrelated to real life—Tony and Sal—who are ultimately proven wrong and vanquished. Part of Felix's revenge is securing continued funding for the theater program within the prison. This development seems to affirm theater's close relationship to real life and its ability to act as a social good, and allows Atwood to argue for the importance of valuing the arts—a modern political angle that is largely absent from the original play.

Both *The Tempest* and *Hag-Seed* interrogate the connection between theater and real life. However, while Shakespeare's play never resolves conflicts between theater's artificiality and the deep truths it's able to embody, Atwood comes to view the world of theater as, if not totally reflective of real life, at least able to improve it.

VENGEANCE

Set in a idyllic Ontario town, *Hag-Seed* is Margaret Atwood's retelling of Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*. Just as the play's protagonist, Prospero, seeks revenge on the man who steals his kingdom, Felix wants to get back at Tony, a former colleague who supplants him as director of a prestigious theater festival. For years after this act of betrayal, Felix is dominated by anger and bitterness. As his desire for revenge becomes more obsessive, it prevents him from building a fulfilling life and brings out the duplicitous and self-centered side of his character. Felix doesn't get over these feelings until he's finally able to avenge himself, but his

vengeance takes the form of a clever scheme that actually benefits several other people. By presenting Felix's final actions in this positive light, the novel shows the negative moral effects of a desire for revenge while also pointing out the ability of restorative action to provide fulfillment and closure after an instance of injustice.

At the beginning of the novel, Felix is dominated and crippled by his desire for revenge. He first appears brooding on his plot to get back at "that devious, twisted bastard, Tony," whom he blames for ousting him from his directorial job and reducing him to living in an isolated cabin, teaching theater classes at a prison. Felix doesn't have any friends, and he spends his leisure time obsessively observing Tony's rise to political power on the Internet. While Tony certainly did Felix a disservice, it's probable that he could find a better house or otherwise improve his life if he desired; in this sense, Felix uses his sense of betrayal to avoid challenging himself or confronting his insecurities.

Moreover, Felix's desire for revenge leads him to make problematic moral choices. The theatrical revenge he eventually stages within the **prison** involves all the prisoners, exposing them to punishment or extended sentences; it also implicates Estelle, a prison advocate who stakes her reputation on his ability to do his job. In order to enact the scheme, he lies to almost everyone he knows, including people who have been kind to him for years. In this sense, his desire for revenge causes him to become as "twisted" and "devious" as the man he despises.

However, while Felix's thirst for vengeance highlights the selfishness of his motivations, his revenge itself actually benefits all of the novel's positive characters. Finding out that Tony and his political cronies, Sal and Sebert, are visiting the prison to see his play, Felix stages an "interactive" version of *The Tempest* during which he drugs and films his nemesis in order to destroy his political career. Tony is on the brink of announcing cuts to prison education programs like the one that Felix runs, but Felix uses the footage to blackmail him into increasing funding instead. He thus saves a social program that has proved immensely beneficial to the prison's inmates.

He also takes the opportunity to throw together Frederick O'Nally, Sal's son, and Anne-Marie, the tough but lonely actress playing Miranda. After the staging of *The Tempest*, the two young people embark on a relationship. While Felix uses his new power to reclaim his post as director of the theater festival, he grooms Frederick and Anne-Marie to take his place, improving their previously floundering careers.

Felix moves from seeing himself as a wronged and pitiable man to someone who can and does use his intelligence to help others. At the close of the novel, he's less self-centered than he once was and more connected to the people around him, suggesting that he will be able to build a more fulfilling life in the future. Desiring revenge brings out the worst aspects of Felix's character, but his method of achieving it demonstrates his good qualities and makes him a better person.

While the novel shows that an excessive hunger for vengeance can impair one's ability to live a meaningful life, it steers clear of unrealistic platitudes about the importance of forgiveness. Rather, it shows how one's worst impulses can be turned to personally and socially positive ends.

IMPRISONMENT AND MARGINALIZATION

In Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Margaret Atwood's retelling *Hag-Seed*, most of the characters spend time trapped in literal and metaphorical **prisons**. Shakespeare's protagonist Prospero is trapped on a desert island after losing his kingdom in a coup; Atwood's equivalent, Felix, exiles himself to a remote cabin after being fired from his job. However, the two men's reactions to their imprisonment are starkly divergent. Prospero uses his magic powers to imprison others, entrapping and abusing the half-human monster Caliban who inhabited the island before him. On the other hand, when Felix takes a teaching job at a prison, he takes charge of a group of men who, like Caliban, have been demonized and exiled within their own society; he uses his power as a director to help them confront their pasts and to stage a revolt against the politicians who exploit prisoners for their own ends. Changing the role of her protagonist, Atwood gives the marginalized characters in her narrative their chance to speak, thus looking to a future of empowerment rather than a continuation of the cycle of incarceration.

In *The Tempest*, Prospero reacts to the loss of his kingdom by imprisoning the inhabitants of the desert island where he himself is trapped. When Prospero arrives on the island, it's inhabited by a spirit named Ariel and Caliban, a half-human, half-monster being who claims to own the island. Prospero enslaves Caliban, forcing him to do chores and constantly describing him as inhuman and unworthy of better treatment. He also forces Ariel, who has magic powers, to do his bidding, although he releases him at the end of the play. It's obvious that Prospero reacts to his own imprisonment by worsening the lives of those around him.

It's probable that Prospero's forcible domination of the island, and his campaign to dehumanize its original inhabitant, mirrors the relationship between European colonizers and natives of conquered territories. In this sense, the proliferation of imprisonment in *The Tempest* reflects anxiety about colonialism, which was becoming a phenomenon as Shakespeare wrote the play. While *The Tempest* at times presents Caliban's grievances as legitimate and gives him some compelling speeches, it ultimately privileges Prospero over him and refrains from protesting too strongly at his plight.

Unlike Prospero, Felix reacts to his own imprisonment by helping to liberate others. While he's often a self-centered character, Felix insists on emphasizing the prisoners' humanity, treats them with dignity, and helps them stage a revolt against the politicians who have no respect for them. By staging Shakespeare's political dramas within the prison, he helps the prisoners confront the traumatic pasts that led them to prison and prepares them to eventually build new lives. At the end of the novel, he's helped secure an early release for one of the prisoners, 8Handz, and takes the young man under his wing during the period of reentry. Rather than perpetuating cycles of imprisonment as Prospero does, Felix works to undo them.

Importantly, the prisoners themselves identify deeply with Caliban; in their staging of *The Tempest*, they transform him from a victim of oppression into a symbol of empowerment. In many ways, the prisoners at Fletcher Correctional Center are much like Caliban: they're demonized and marginalized by their society, especially the powerful politicians that occasionally descend to visit the prison. Atwood even strengthens this connection by suggesting that their current incarceration is the result of living within a society defined by its racist and colonialist past. Red Coyote, a Native Canadian prisoner, points out that Caliban was driven to villainy because he "got his land stole," just as many prisoners turned to crime because of their disadvantaged social status.

At the end of the novel, a prisoner named Leggs presents a rap he's written from the perspective of Caliban, in which he says he "ain't gonna get on the back of the bus / and you can give your land right back to us!" The prisoners tie Caliban to the struggle of various marginalized groups for civil rights, making him a positive rather than a negative character. Ultimately, it's their strong identification with Caliban that inspires them to revolt against the politicians visiting the prison to see their play—men who, in their exploitative and disrespectful attitude towards prisoners' rights, have taken on the oppressive character that Prospero displays in the world of *The Tempest*.

Importantly, Prospero often derides Caliban with the pejorative "Hag-Seed," meaning that he's the son of a witch. Felix and the prisoners reclaim this word, employing it positively in the speeches they write about Caliban, and Atwood uses it for the title of her book. The transformation of the name from insult to acclamation reflects the novel's shift towards active protest against mass incarceration and the oppressive social systems this phenomenon represents.

TRANSFORMATION AND CHANGE

Like the play on which it's based, Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, *Hag-Seed* is a novel full of transformations, in which characters constantly change roles, ascend to power, or fall into disgrace. The novel's protagonist, Felix, initially sees such transformations as inherently false and unjust; he devotes most of the novel to returning himself and his adversary, Tony, to their original states. However, as his revenge plot progresses it becomes evident that rather than betraying the natural order of things, transformations can also help characters improve their lives, and Felix's habit of clinging to a static notion of his own place in the world proves unhealthy and unrealistic. Ultimately, the novel affirms the positive role of change and transformation in bringing out the best parts of human nature and facilitating personal growth.

Felix spends most of the novel trying to reverse the major transformation that occurs at the outset: Tony's rise to prominence within the theater festival, and his own fall into disgrace. He sees his nemesis's ability to change both their positions so abruptly as evidence of his "devious" and immoral nature. Moreover, he sees himself, by virtue of his talent and creativity, as inherently entitled to his fame and cushy job; any deviation from his privileged status is a violation of his core being. Indeed, Tony's rise to political power after usurping Felix emerges as a series of hoaxes and bribes. He becomes a state minister with demonstrably bad morals and no clear qualifications. Tony's trajectory characterizes the idea of personal transformation as inherently false and insidious. At the same time, it's interesting that Felix feels this way, given that he's a director who excels at creating his fantastical effects onstage, transforming his actors from ordinary people into exotic and powerful characters. At the beginning of the novel, it's clear that he doesn't see transformations onstage as having any relation to ones that occur in real life.

As Felix begins to stage Shakespeare productions at the **Fletcher Correctional Center**, he experiences and observes transformations that are natural and good—particularly in the extent to which they meld theater and real life. No one thinks that the prisoners will take to Shakespeare, but the program proves hugely successful. Transforming into characters like those in *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar* isn't a betrayal of the prisoners' natures; rather, it brings out their latent creativity and confidence and helps them address the violence and crime that has shaped their lives and led to their incarceration. In this sense, transformation affirms their good qualities and helps them work through their mistakes.

Similarly, Felix thinks of his persona as a teacher as inherently a pose; when he dresses in his stereotypically academic clothes, he imagines himself donning the **costume** of a "genial but authoritative retired teacher and theatre wonk." However, by the end of the novel he becomes this person he's pretending to be, and this transformation is a marked improvement on the self-centered and duplicitous nature with which he began the novel. Even some of the artificial transformations that occur within Felix's staging of *The Tempest* lead to beneficial changes in real life—Felix throws Frederick and Anne-Marie together in an extremely contrived set-up, but he sparks a sincere and positive romance that rescues both young people from

loneliness.

In many cases, it's actually by avoiding change and clinging to stability that characters bring falsity into their lives. Felix frequently hallucinates that his dead daughter Miranda exists and keeps him company. Her ghostly presence allows him to ignore the terrible change that her death wrought in his life. However, as the years pass, he feels that Miranda's spirit is becoming unhappy and restless in the circumscribed, static life she shares with him. At the end of the novel, he realizes that by conjuring up Miranda's little-girl persona he's not preserving her spirit but "keeping her tethered to him." When he gives up her hallucination, he feels that she's "fading" and "losing substance." While this isn't a pleasant transformation, it's presented as important and unavoidable, both for Miranda's tranquility and Felix's mental health.

On another note, it's also interesting that when Tony and Sal visit the prison to see the production of *The Tempest*, they see the prisoners as having falsely transformed themselves by becoming actors. Atwood presents their views as punitive and ungenerous—just because of the prisoners' criminal past, the politicians see them as unworthy of intellectual growth and a new life. However, their beliefs are very similar to the ones with which Felix begins the novel. This juxtaposition shows how much Felix's own views have transformed over time.

While not every transformation in the novel is positive, they always help people develop; rather than betraying their essential character, they reveal it. Ultimately, the novel embraces transformations, using them to promote an essentially fluid version of human nature, which is defined by the changes it undergoes rather than the extent to which it stays the same.

GRIEF

The beginning of *Hag-Seed* is marked by two serious losses for the protagonist, Felix: his job as director of a famous theater festival, which his assistant Tony steals, and his young daughter Miranda, who has recently died of meningitis. Understandably, Felix addresses his grief by plotting to reclaim what he has lost. He devotes a decade of his life to avenging himself against Tony and getting his job back, and in the meantime he becomes fixated on a hallucinatory "ghost" of Miranda. However, as time passes Felix realizes that he can never return to the life he once had, and will be happier trying to build a new one. By the end of the novel Felix has neither resumed his career nor revived his daughter, but he's achieved a deep sense of peace by abandoning the effort to do so.

Felix associates the loss of his daughter with the loss of his job, and in his plot against Tony he seeks to recreate the life he enjoyed before the beginning of the novel. Tony fires Felix just as he is preparing to stage a production of *The Tempest*, which will focus on the father-daughter relationship between Prospero and Miranda. Felix's own daughter, who has just died of meningitis at the age of three, was named Miranda, and he sees the play as "a kind of reincarnation," telling himself that he will be able to "catch sight of" her through the play.

Throughout the long decade during which he plots revenge against Tony, Felix imagines resuming exactly the same position in the theater festival and returning to his staging of *The Tempest*. This vision soothes his professional anxieties and, he feels, will help him overcome his grief for Miranda. Felix dismisses the prospect of seeking another theater job or forming any other personal relationships.

In fact, rather than trying to replace the things he has lost he moves to the woods, giving up both creative work and all but minimal contact with other people. By becoming reliant on the ghostly Miranda, whom he feels is real, he allows himself to pretend that she has never died at all. Even when he takes a job as an English teacher at **Fletcher Correctional Center**, he envisions this as a way to recoup his losses. Staging *The Tempest* there allows him to take down Tony and feel closer to Miranda, whom he sometimes feels is speaking to him during rehearsals.

While Felix's revenge plot is successful, it ultimately leads to the realization that he can never reclaim his daughter and doesn't want the job he had before; however, these revelations are not disappointments but moments of personal growth. After being reinstated as artistic director of the theater festival, Felix begins to retreat from the theater world and trains Frederick and Anne-Marie to one day take over from him. Watching them take to the industry with enthusiasm, he feels some "nostalgia" for his own artistic past but mostly "happy" for their bright future. He hasn't reclaimed anything, but he's put aside the self-centered obsessions that guided him for most of the novel and learned to take deep joy in the well-being of others. In this sense, accepting his loss has helped Felix become a better person.

Moreover, rather than clinging to the hallucinatory Miranda, who has been his sole companion for so many years, Felix is finally able to bid her farewell. He now realizes that "the endgame of his obsession wasn't to bring his Miranda back to life" but to find some peace after her loss. Quoting *The Tempest*, he releases her with the benediction "to the elements be free." Felix thus liberates his daughter's spirit and opens the possibility of a new life for himself. At the end of the novel he prepares to embark on a long cruise with Estelle, his colleague and potential love interest. Rather than recreating his old life, this relationship marks a final break with that life and the beginning of a new path.

Felix never fully overcomes his grief, and he certainly never forgets his daughter—in the novel's final scene, he looks fondly at her photograph. However, by abandoning the obsessive and futile desire to reclaim what he has once lost, Felix is able to

retain the memories of his old life while building a new one.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

PRISONS

Prisons, both mental and physical, dominate the novel. After getting fired from his job, Felix exiles himself to a primitive cottage and allows himself no contact with his former life; he becomes so obsessed with his grief for his daughter Miranda and desire for revenge on Tony that he's unable to form new relationships with others. In this sense, he keeps himself in an emotional prison for most of the novel. Ironically, it's by going to work in a real concrete prison that he's able to liberate himself by finding new purpose. When he tells the ghost of his daughter to "be free" at the end of the novel, Felix uses the rhetoric of imprisonment and release to express that freedom is a matter of personal choice.

For the inmates at Fletcher Correctional Center, however, imprisonment has nothing to do with personal choice. On the contrary, most of them see prison as the manifestation of the social oppression which has characterized their lives and the history of their country. This is particularly evident through their strong identification with Caliban, a "monster" in *The Tempest* who is imprisoned and enslaved for most of the play; rewriting Caliban's story and imagining a triumphant life for him after the play, they reframe his imprisonment as a result of the social conditions under which he lives, rather than his innate character or morals. Moments like this argue that while people create some prisons for themselves, others are enforced by society in order to demonize and disadvantage its most vulnerable members.

COSTUMES

In *Hag-Seed*, costumes are means both of tricking other people and uncovering hidden aspects of oneself. Felix often invokes costumes when he's trying to deceive someone. His favorite one, a cloak made of stuffed animal skins made for Prospero in his original, cancelled production of *The Tempest*, allows Felix to pretend that he is a man at the height of power, rather than a recently-bereaved father; it represents his determination to delude himself and those around him. However, during his exile Felix often takes strength from looking at his cape in the closet; contemplating and eventually donning it allows him to access hidden reserves of determination and complete his revenge. Felix also thinks of the scruffy clothes he wears to work in the **prison** as a costume, which convinces others that he's a harmless old teacher rather than a vengeful schemer. But by the end of the novel Felix does essentially become a harmless old teacher, much more concerned with his students' success than his own plots. Although his clothes originally conceal a lie, they end up representing the truth.

Similarly, the prisoners adopt different costumes in order to express different parts of themselves. Watching his returning students adopt their stage names at the beginning of his course, Felix remarks that they "welcome the return of this other self of theirs, standing there like a costume." Even though their stage names are fake and constructed, they allow the prisoners to access their thoughtfulness and intellectual curiosity—characteristics not normally fostered by prison life. Once they've designed their real costumes for the play, the prisoners all give better and more genuine performances; even though dressing up as sailors or wizards represents their abandonment of reality, it also allows them to express their talent and abilities in a way they can't in real life. Appearing throughout the novel, costumes symbolize the uneasy coexistence of illusion and truth, both on and off stage.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Random House edition of *Hag-Seed* published in 2017.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ What to do with such a sorrow? It was like an enormous black cloud boiling up over the horizon…He had to transform it, or at the very least enclose it.

Related Characters: Miranda, Felix Phillips / Mr. Duke

Related Themes:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

In a flashback, Felix discusses his original motivations for staging *The Tempest*. Felix's obsession begins while he's grieving for his young daughter Miranda, who has recently died of meningitis—he decides that this process will help him overcome his loss. It's interesting that he uses the word "transform" here, since transformation and change are recurrent concerns throughout the novel. In his daily life, Felix usually resists the idea of transformation—for example, he views the loss of his job and status not just as misfortune but a violation of his fundamental entitlements. However, he's much more willing to embrace personal

transformation when it happens in the context of a play, and framing such transformations as performances helps him embrace the change that naturally occurs in his life.

On the other hand, while Felix's prison production of *The Tempest* brings about transformation in himself and his actors, the one thing it doesn't change is Felix's grief for Miranda. By the end of the novel, Felix will realize that there's no method of "enclosing," or curing, his loss; however, this will come not as a disappointment but a moment of personal revelation.

❝ Miranda would become the daughter who had not been lost; who'd been a protecting cherub, cheering her exiled father…What he couldn't have in life he might still catch sight of through his art: just a glimpse, from the corner of his eye.

Related Characters: Miranda, Felix Phillips / Mr. Duke

Related Themes:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage Felix expands on his hopes for his original production of *The Tempest*, speaking of the play as if it actually can bring Miranda back to life. What Felix hopes to accomplish here is an act of radical restoration—he wants to halt the terrible change of Miranda's death and put her back on the natural course of childhood. Even though they stem from love, not anger, Felix's feelings of grief are much like his feelings of revenge in that they represent a desire to return to a previous era in his life.

It's also interesting that Felix imagines that his production will allow him to "glimpse" Miranda from "the corner of his eye." Felix knows that much of his theatrical work is based on illusion, which most people would consider fundamentally divorced from the real world. However, he considers the effects of his work not as false but as adjacent to the events of real life, and just as valuable. His belief that the illusions of theater can actually produce truth paves the way for the appearance of the spritely Miranda on whom Felix will depend for years.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ By choosing this shack and the privations that would come with it, he would of course be sulking. He'd be hair-shirting himself, playing the flagellant, the hermit. *Watch me suffer*. He recognized his own act, an act with no audience but himself.

Related Characters: Felix Phillips / Mr. Duke

Related Themes:

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

After Tony abruptly fires him from his position as Artistic Director of the Makeshiweg Festival, Felix impulsively decides to rent a rural cottage and disappear from his old life. Even though this decision takes him out of the public eye, he still thinks of it as a performance. On one hand this is comforting, as performing is what he's always done; on the other, it's fundamentally disturbing as Felix has to confront a world in which no one wants to watch his performances. Moments like this suggest that theater—whether it takes place onstage or in the drama of daily life—is fundamentally dependent on the interaction between people, and thus an extremely flexible and mutable art form.

It's also notable that even though Felix blames his professional demise entirely on Tony, he's also somewhat aware of the extent to which he's punishing himself. As he does in the title of this chapter, Felix will often describe the cottage with the rhetoric of jails and traps. His feelings of imprisonment will eventually help him identify with the actors of his troop. At the same time, there's a clear difference between the prisoners at Fletcher Correctional Center—who have little control over their fates and whose incarceration is often the result of longstanding social oppression—and Felix, whose imprisonment is largely a function of his own inability to confront his past.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ 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.

Related Characters: Felix Phillips / Mr. Duke

Related Themes:

Page Number: 58

Explanation and Analysis

After each performance that he stages in Fletcher Correctional Center, Felix hosts a small cast party in which the prisoners watch the production on video. They especially love seeing their names in credits, as they don't often receive this kind of validation for hard work. On one level, the language of this passage situates the prisoners as

very distanced from themselves: by watching others "watching their own faces" they're already at a remove from the performance, and even within that performance they're not themselves but "someone else." At the same time, the production allows them to reframe their self-conception and view themselves as talented and capable actors, rather than ostracized prisoners; even though they seem to be escaping from themselves they're actually gaining a new and more positive window into their own character. In this sense, the passage argues that while theater depends on make-believe to a certain extent, it's also capable of revealing personal truth.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ It's necessary to look like the version of himself that's become familiar up at Fletcher: the genial but authoritative retired teacher and theater wonk, a little eccentric and naïve but an okay guy who's generously donating his time because he believes in the possibility of betterment.

Related Characters: Felix Phillips / Mr. Duke

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

When he gets a job teaching theater at the Fletcher Correctional Center, Felix starts dressing the way he thinks a "genial and authoritative retired teacher" should dress—work shirts, tweed jackets, and practical boots. He even grows a beard. It's interesting that he starts projecting this stereotypically harmless persona long before he decides to use his position to achieve revenge; the compulsion to "dress up" shows how uncomfortable he is with presenting an authentic, unfiltered version of himself at the prison. Maybe he doesn't even know what that self would look like.

In this passage, Felix emerges as a little disdainful of the kind and selfless persona he's creating. However, after he achieves his revenge at the end of the novel, he will give up his dreams of power and become content teaching at the prison and moving into a tranquil retirement with Estelle. In essence, he will become the person he's pretending to be; he'll find much more happiness in this role than he experiences now, and it's clearly an improvement over his originally self-centered and devious character. Although Felix thinks of his work costume as a method of concealing his real character, it's actually a vehicle by which he unwittingly transforms himself.

❝ If she'd lived, she would have been at the awkward teenager stage: making dismissive comments, rolling her eyes at him, dying her hair, tattooing her arms…

But none of this has happened. She remains simple, she remains innocent. She's such a comfort.

Related Characters: Miranda, Felix Phillips / Mr. Duke

Related Themes:

Page Number: 62

Explanation and Analysis

By this point in the novel, the ghostly Miranda has been appearing to Felix for several years, originally as a young child and now as a teenager. Felix takes comfort in the idea that he's "taking care" of her and raising her into a young woman. However, while Miranda appears to grow up, she actually remains the tiny girl that Felix once knew—he describes her here as "simple" and "innocent," and later on her absolute lack of knowledge about the outside world makes her seem much more like a toddler than a teenager. Felix is not only trying to imagine his daughter back to life, but to forestall all the transformations that would naturally have occurred as she grew up, as well as the attendant changes in their relationship. By the end of the novel he'll realize that he's not protecting Miranda but keeping her trapped in a "simple" role she should have long outgrown; his ultimate release of her spirit signals not only a moment of closure but a new embrace of natural change.

❝ His magic garment is hanging in there too, shoved to the back. The cloak of his defeat, dead husk of his drowned self.

No, not dead, but changed. In the gloom, in the gloaming, it's been transforming itself, slowly coming alive.

Related Characters: Felix Phillips / Mr. Duke

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

When he finds out that his nemesis Tony, now a successful politician, is coming to visit his theater class, Felix impulsively decides to stage *The Tempest*. After making this decision, he examines the fantastic cape lying in his closet—the one physical remainder of his original production of *The Tempest*, which Tony cancelled all those years ago. For the last years Felix has viewed the cape as a symbol of his "defeat" and exile from professional life. However, now it signals Felix's next transformation, into a newly powerful and vengeful director. In essence, the cape represents the contradictions in Felix's character, and it helps him come to grips with the idea of personal transformation, rather than viewing it as something essentially false and duplicitous.

Chapter 12 Quotes

This is the extent of it, Felix muses. My island domain. My place of exile. My penance.

My theater.

Related Characters: Felix Phillips / Mr. Duke

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

Entering Fletcher Correctional Center on the first day of his latest course, Felix walks through the small block of classrooms where he holds classes, runs rehearsals, and ultimately films his productions. With its lack of resources, formal equipment, or professional staff, the prison is a letdown compared to the other places where Felix has worked, and arriving there reminds him of his professional demise. In his own mind, it also likens him to Prospero, *The Tempest's* protagonist—just as Prospero is exiled to a deserted island, he has to make his way in a new and unfamiliar environment.

At the same time, by taking a breath and reminding himself that this is "my theater," Felix points out that he's still doing the same work he's done all his life; while Felix often acts snobby, at heart he has a very egalitarian vision of theater, which allows him to see the potential in his actors and stage high-quality productions despite his environment. Moreover, he implicitly points out that Prospero uses his magic powers to turn his island into a theater, where he stages a performance that vanquishes his enemies. Felix's place of exile is already a theater, and he too will use it as a tool of revenge, following in Prospero's footsteps.

Chapter 13 Quotes

Your profanity, thinks Felix, has often been your whoreson hag-born progenitor of literacy. Along with your whoreson cigarettes, may the red plague rid them.

Related Characters: Felix Phillips / Mr. Duke

Related Themes:

Page Number: 91

Explanation and Analysis

One of Felix's methods of generating enthusiasm about the plays, and encouraging the prisoners to interact with texts that can be daunting, is a game wherein they have to identify all the curse words used in the play. For the entirety of the course, if they want to swear, they have to do so with those words. Although this might just seem like a gimmick, it actually says a lot about Felix's conception of Shakespeare and the kinds of productions he wants to stage. Felix constantly fights back against the elitist notion that as "classics," Shakespeare plays express only the most highbrow themes and can only be approached by appropriately intellectual audiences. Rather—as he points out in moments like this—the plays are filled with cursing and dirty jokes. At one point, Felix even points out to Estelle that Shakespearean actors were largely illiterate and considered basically criminal for their disreputable profession, not unlike the actors with whom he's currently working. In this sense, the game communicates to the actors that Shakespeare is *not* the exclusive property of the elite; rather, the plays belong to anyone willing to seriously examine the high ideas and low humor they contain.

Chapter 14 Quotes

"Colonialism," says 8Handz, who spent a lot of time on the Internet in his former life as a hacker. "Prospero thinks he's so awesome and superior, he can put down what other people think."

Related Characters: 8Handz (speaker), Felix Phillips / Mr. Duke

Related Themes:

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

At first, Felix has difficulty getting his actors excited about *The Tempest*, which is much different from the political dramas to which they're accustomed. What's most notable in their early discussions is the extent to which their interpretation of the play differs from his own. Felix thinks of Prospero, like himself, as a sympathetic character driven by love for his daughter and the desire for revenge. On the contrary, the prisoners see the exiled duke as an oppressor himself and identify primarily with the island's only native resident, Caliban, whom Prospero has enslaved. With his comment here, 8Handz evokes the long-standing scholarly arguments that *The Tempest* does indeed reflect contemporary anxieties about colonialism, a new phenomenon when Shakespeare wrote the play. More importantly, it draws an explicit link between Caliban's treatment within the play and the social oppression, stemming from colonialism, which has shaped many of the prisoners' own lives. While Felix is at first resistant to this characterization of Prospero, he will eventually prove very supportive of the prisoners' efforts to give Caliban his own voice and storyline—showing that, while he and Prospero have similar concerns, he doesn't share the wizard's primary flaws.

Chapter 17 Quotes

❝ Fool, he tells himself. She's not here. She was never here. It was imagination and wishful thinking, nothing but that. Resign yourself.

He can't resign himself.

Related Characters: Miranda, Felix Phillips / Mr. Duke

Related Themes:

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

By this point, Felix is used to Miranda's "presence" in his cottage when he returns home from working at the prison. On days when he doesn't immediately see her, he's momentarily jerked out of his illusions and reminded that she doesn't, technically speaking, exist; however, this doesn't stop him from continuing to conjure her up. Passages like this highlight the difference between Felix's quest for revenge and his struggle to overcome his grief, the two problems that drive him throughout the novel. While the first desire can be satisfied with specific, linear actions, addressing his grief is a much more cyclical process with no definitive end in sight.

It's also interesting that as Felix becomes more committed and purposeful in his work, he finds his home life even lonelier and bleaker than before. His work in the prison spurs him to start a new chapter in his life, but it does so by forcing him to cut ties with his old ways.

Chapter 18 Quotes

❝ ...the island is a theater. Prospero is a director. He's putting on a play within which there's another play. If his magic holds and his play is successful, he'll get his heart's desire. But if he fails...

Related Characters: Felix Phillips / Mr. Duke

Related Themes:

Page Number: 118

Explanation and Analysis

While his students are busy with a writing exercise, Felix reflects on his quest for revenge and its similarity to Prospero's own plotline within *The Tempest*. Felix identifies with Prospero because they are both manipulating people around them into performing a series of actions that will accomplish their revenge. In fact, Felix's profession as an actual director is a reflection of the extent to which Prospero emerges as a theatrical genius over the course of *The Tempest*. On one hand, this position gives both men a sense of devious, hidden power: they're able to accomplish much more than anyone believes they can, and vanquish enemies who seem more powerful than they are. At the same time, it's clear that weakness and defeat are always lurking around the corner.

For Prospero, who achieves revenge but mournfully loses his magic powers at the end of the play, the tension between power and weakness remains unresolved; because of this, *The Tempest* provides an uneasy meditation about the abilities and limitations of people who make theater, like Shakespeare himself. However, in *Hag-Seed*, Felix hands his newly-won privileges to Anne-Marie without much regret and moves on to a new phase in his life; in this sense, the novel conveys a more unequivocally positive image of the power of theater.

Chapter 28 Quotes

But my other name's Hag-Seed, or that's what he call me
He call me a lotta names, he play me a lotta games
He call me poison, a filth, a slave,
He prison me up to make me behave,
But I'm Hag-Seed!

Related Characters: Leggs (speaker), Felix Phillips / Mr. Duke

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 179

Explanation and Analysis

Just as Felix has almost finished rehearsals for *The Tempest*, Leggs says that he and his team have written and practiced a rap from Caliban's perspective. In the rap, Leggs reinvents the oppressed and demonized Caliban as "Hag-Seed," who is now empowered to control his own narrative (a fact also reflected in the fact that the novel takes its title from his name). By rewriting certain scenes and injecting new monologues into the play, the actors are able to uplift the character with whom they most identify—and in doing so, uplift themselves as well. This rap isn't just an exercise in writing or performance, but an act of self-empowerment.

It's also noteworthy that while Felix encourages his students to consider incarceration from the perspective of Prospero and Miranda, who are trapped on the island, they are more compelled by Caliban's imprisonment at Prospero's hands. Felix's circumstances often mirror the events in *The Tempest*, but in this case they diverge: both Felix and his students blame their imprisonment on the seedy political elite represented by Felix's personal nemesis, Tony. Rather than exploiting the prisoners, Felix helps them liberate themselves as much as possible. In this sense, he's crucially different from Prospero.

Chapter 29 Quotes

Idiot, he tells himself. How long will you keep yourself on this intravenous drip? Just enough illusion to keep you alive. Pull the plug, why don't you? Give up your tinsel stickers, your paper cutouts, your colored crayons. Face the plain, unvarnished grime of real life.

Related Characters: Miranda, Felix Phillips / Mr. Duke

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 182

Explanation and Analysis

When he wakes up one morning, Felix looks around for Miranda and doesn't see her anywhere. He comforts himself that she often requires twilight to appear—but then interrupts his own thoughts with this passage, in which he castigates himself for relying so much on what seems to be a delusional manifestation of his daughter. It's notable that Felix compares Miranda's appearances to "stickers," "cutouts," and "crayons"—the very things that his students use to make sets and costumes for their plays. In a sense, Miranda's ghost is a costume which Felix uses to dress up his lonely life.

However, in *Hag-Seed* costumes don't just represent the world of make-believe but also bring out hidden aspects of those who wear them. Given that, this comparison points out the logical falsity of Felix's belief in Miranda but also hints that there is some authenticity to it. Indeed, in the next paragraph Felix reflects that life is made of every "hue, including those we can't see." The theatrical image he uses to describe Miranda is a devastating reminder that she doesn't technically exist, but it also helps show Felix the validity of his own feelings.

Chapter 33 Quotes

Prisons are for incarceration and punishment, not for spurious attempts to educate those who cannot, by their very natures, be educated. What's the quote? Nature versus nurture, something like that. Is it from a play?

Related Characters: Sal O'Nally

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 211

Explanation and Analysis

When Sal and Tony arrive with their entourage to view the prisoners' performance, the novel shifts to their perspective in order to capture their (largely reprehensible) thoughts. In this passage, Sal reflects on what he sees as the pointlessness of prisoner education; he sees the prisoners

as having fixed and unalterable characters, with no redeeming features and no possibility of improvement. His beliefs are obviously unjust, displaying a deep self-righteousness and profound ignorance of the perseverance and intelligence Felix's students have displayed throughout the course. However, his skepticism about the likelihood of personal transformation is remarkably reminiscent of Felix's own views at the beginning of the novel. Sal's musings here don't just demonstrate his own seedy character but point out the extent to which Felix's ideas and character have positively evolved as a result of his work.

Chapter 35 Quotes

"That's not bad," says Anne-Marie. "Maybe with more feeling. Pretend you're falling in love with me."

"But," says Freddie. "Maybe I *am* falling in love with you. O you wonder!"

Related Characters: Anne-Marie Greenland, Frederick O'Nally (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 222

Explanation and Analysis

After the politicians enter the prison, Felix and his students hijack the play and "kidnap" the visitors. While Felix reckons with Tony and Sal, young Frederick is kept in a small cell, where Anne-Marie visits him and tells him that in order to survive the "riot," they have to perform the scenes between *The Tempest's* lovers, Miranda and Ferdinand. Frederick is highly aware that he's participating in a fantasy—he's reading lines from a script, which are theoretically unconnected to his own feelings. However, the tiny performance he and Anne-Marie stage causes him to develop genuine feelings for her. Moreover, while Anne-Marie refers to their interaction as "pretend" and truly understands the many illusions at work behind the play, she too will soon fall in love with Frederick. Although their actions seem to be premised in falsity, they actually engender one of the novel's most lasting relationships. As in many other moments, the make-believe process of theater doesn't obscure the actors' true characters but instead reveals and even creates them.

Chapter 38 Quotes

"We could put them on show," says TimEEz. "Gibbering lunatics. Street people. Addicts. Dregs of society. Always good for a laugh."

Related Characters: TimEEz (speaker), Sebert Stanley, Tony Price, Sal O'Nally

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 236

Explanation and Analysis

After the politicians eat Felix's drugged grapes, they all fall prey to various frightening delusions. In the midst of their bad trip, TimEEz and Red Coyote—playing Stephano and Trinculo—enter the room and begin speculating amongst themselves on how best to exploit these weakened men. Of course, to expose or exhibit the politicians as "gibbering lunatics" and "dregs of society" would be unfair—it's not their fault that they've been drugged, and their behavior now hardly represents the best of their character. However, the prisoners are recycling the rhetoric that politicians use to condemn and marginalize *them*—often for offenses like drug use and petty robbery, which stem from poverty and social oppression, rather than inherently bad character.

Importantly, in *The Tempest* Stephano and Trinculo plot to exhibit Caliban, whom they consider savage and monstrous. This production flips the script, allowing the prisoners to exploit those who have exploited them. Clever innovations like this are one way in which the prisoners turn their identification with Caliban into a symbol of liberation, not oppression.

You called me dirty, you called me a scum,
You called me a criminal, a no-good bum,
But you're a white-collar crook, you been cookin' the books,
Rakin' taxpayer money, we know what you took,
So who's more monstrous…than you?

Related Characters: Leggs (speaker), Sebert Stanley, Tony Price, Sal O'Nally

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 237

Explanation and Analysis

After TimEEz and Red Coyote frighten the politicians by threatening to "put them on show," Leggs enters the room, dressed in his frightening Caliban costume. He performs an original rap which is theoretically addressed to the characters Antonio and Alonso, but perfectly encapsulates the relationship between prisoners and politicians. Leggs focuses on the insults that have been used against him and his comrades; this device recalls all the attention that Felix devoted to the use of swear words in *The Tempest*. Felix has described cursing as the "progenitor of literacy," but it's also provided impetus for the prisoners to examine the smears that are often used against them.

In particular, Leggs uses the rap to debunk the idea that the prisoners, Caliban's modern-day heirs, are "monsters" who deserve to be locked up and exiled from society. He points out that in fact it's the politicians who have used their privilege to commit crimes to their own advantage, often with consequences much greater than the petty felonies for which the prisoners are incarcerated. Once again, the prisoners are flipping the script on the politicians; they transform the rhetoric and speeches previously used to condemn Caliban into an indictment of their adversaries' crimes and a call for their punishment.

Chapter 41 Quotes

...it's Ariel who changes Prospero's mind, from revenge to forgiveness, because despite the crap they did, he feels sorry for the bad guys and what they're being put through...so we take it that's okay—to change our own minds.

Related Characters: 8Handz (speaker), Felix Phillips / Mr. Duke

Related Themes:

Page Number: 253

Explanation and Analysis

After the eventful performance, the players have to complete their last assignment, predicting an "afterlife" for each character. When 8Handz stands up to give his team's report, he begins by talking about Ariel's influential actions throughout the play—not only does he create the illusions that facilitate Prospero's revenge, he helps transform Prospero's character as well. It's interesting that he says this, because one of the most important things Felix has learned over the course of the play is how to accept change in himself and others—and these lessons have often come from the many Ariels in his life. It's 8Handz, with his discussions of colonialism, who prompted Felix to reexamine Prospero's character and the extent to which he identifies with the tyrannical wizard. Estelle, who also represents Ariel, has helped Felix open up to new friendships and will shortly convince him to go on a cruise, thus starting a long-forestalled new chapter in his life. Finally, it's by taking on Ariel's role in the play that the ghostly Miranda shows Felix that she can't continue forever in her childlike relationship to him; she must change and "be free" as well.

Chapter 46 Quotes

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!

Related Characters: Leggs (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 278

Explanation and Analysis

At the cast party with which Felix ends his course, Leggs and his team announce that they are working on a musical about Caliban called "Hag-Seed," after one of Prospero's insulting nicknames for him. Leggs then performs one of the musical's first numbers, a rap in which Caliban, having escaped from jail, exults in his new freedom. In this passage, Leggs explicitly connects Caliban to the struggles of marginalized people to achieve equality, from Civil Rights-Era African Americans refusing to sit "on the back of the bus" to First Peoples fighting for sovereignty over their land. While Caliban is tied to these groups through the oppression he experiences within the play, they've transformed him from a symbol of powerlessness to an icon of liberation. Although the actors conceived this idea independently of Felix, they've essentially proved his argument that theater considered "classic" and unapproachable can be both relevant and radical in the modern world.

Chapter 47 Quotes

Prospero says to the audience, in effect, Unless you help me sail away, I'll have to stay on the island – that is, he'll be under an enchantment. He'll be forced to re-enact his feelings of revenge, over and over. It would be like hell.

Related Characters: Felix Phillips / Mr. Duke (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 282

Explanation and Analysis

Before the cast party ends, the actors ask Felix to reveal the "ninth prison" at which he hinted during one of the first classes. Felix explains that the play itself is a prison to Prospero. While the wizard has manipulated most of the preceding events to achieve his revenge—and trapped many of the other characters along the way—at the end, he finds himself facing imprisonment. This important speech reflects on the fact that those who make theater can be both empowered and trapped by their creations. This is true of Felix as well—his production of *The Tempest* has given him purpose and vanquished his enemies, but his obsession with it has largely derailed his life over the last several years.

However, while Prospero feels trapped and powerless at the end of the play, Felix feels a strong sense of release at this point in his own narrative—now that his revenge is accomplished, he's free to make a new start. This divergence is one of the key ways in which Felix differs from Prospero; it's this factor that causes the novel to depart from the play's uneasiness and end on an unambiguously positive note.

Epilogue Quotes

But at least he's given them a start. His life has had this one good result, however ephemeral that result may prove to be.

But everything is ephemeral, he reminds himself. All gorgeous palaces, all cloud-capped towers. Who should know that better than he?

Related Characters: Frederick O'Nally, Anne-Marie Greenland, Felix Phillips / Mr. Duke

Related Themes:

Page Number: 289

Explanation and Analysis

After successfully blackmailing his nemeses, Felix is finally able to secure the return of his original job as Artistic Director of the Makeshiweg festival. However, rather than exulting in his restored power and focusing on his own creative projects, he recognizes that it's time for him to step aside and foster new talent; accordingly, he focuses on training Anne-Marie and Frederick to take over the festival. Watching them work on some set designs, he has a moment of reflection that demonstrates the extent of his character transformation. Felix used to measure his life by the professional successes he's achieved, but now he says that the "one good result" of his life is helping these two young people. Unlike his namesake Prospero, Felix has become much more outward-looking and selfless since the start of the novel. Moreover, by reminding himself that "everything is ephemeral," Felix calmly accepts the inevitability of change—something that was originally impossible for him. As well as being beneficial to those around him, these shifts in character will help Felix move into a new stage of his life with tranquility and happiness.

...That was his idea, if not of hell exactly, then at least of limbo. A state of suspension, somewhere on the road to death. But on second thought, what did he have to lose? The Road to death is after all the road he's on, so why not eat well during the journey?

Related Characters: Estelle, Felix Phillips / Mr. Duke

Related Themes:

Page Number: 290

Explanation and Analysis

As Felix packs up his few possessions, he reflects on his acceptance of Estelle's recent invitation—to join her on a cruise to the Caribbean. In some ways, this decision is the realization of Felix's fears at the beginning of the novel, when he worried that because of his professional exile he would become a boring old man who developed silly hobbies and had liaisons with middle-aged women. At that point, Felix was convinced of his artistic genius, and wanted his life to be reflective of that genius. Now, he's realized that no matter how many plays he directs, just like everyone else he's bound to grow old, slip into retirement, and die. This might seem like a disappointing epiphany, but it's actually

comforting to Felix; because he's no longer obsessed with being better than everyone else, he's able to truly connect to other people, like Estelle. Old age has been one of the transformations most troubling to Felix, but now he sees it as not only inevitable but positive.

> 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.

Related Characters: Miranda, Felix Phillips / Mr. Duke

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 292

Explanation and Analysis

In one of the novel's last passages, Felix reflects on the ghostly Miranda, now ceasing to appear to him. Just as *The Tempest* ends with the revelation that the play itself is a trap to Prospero, the end of the novel reveals an unexpected form of imprisonment—Felix realizes that rather than preserving his daughter's memory or taking care of her, he's been using her for his own comfort and keeping her trapped in an existence she doesn't want. While Felix often identifies with Prospero's concerns, he sees that he sometimes shares in the wizard's flaws as well. However, while Prospero can do nothing about his situation at the end of the play except ask the audience's forgiveness, Felix can and does take action: he tells his daughter to "be free," and puts her ghostly apparition behind him. This moment represents the culmination of the two lessons Felix has learned throughout the novel: concern for others and acceptance of change. While the play closes by questioning the extent of Prospero's power, the novel ends on an affirmation of Felix's personal transformation.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PROLOGUE: SCREENING

It's March 13th, 2013. An audience sits before a stage on which a screen announces that Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* will be performed by the Fletcher Correctional Players. An announcer begins the play by ominously telling the audience that "what you're gonna see, is a storm at sea: winds are howlin', sailors yowlin'."

Shakespeare productions may call up the idea of extravagant or archaic language, but the announcer speaks in modern, recognizable vernacular. Right away, the production and Atwood herself are collapsing the distance between theater and real life.

A boatswain enters, dripping with water. He shouts that the ship is sinking, and will soon be run aground. Voices offstage call for help and accuse the boatswain of being an idiot. The spirit Ariel enters, wearing a bathing cap and goggles, followed by "an odd shadow." He points upward and lightning claps.

In The Tempest, the spirit Ariel is known for his ability to control the weather. In this production 8Handz, the prisoner who plays Ariel, is responsible for the special effects that create the illusion of weather.

Suddenly all the lights go black. The audience wonders aloud what's happening, and if a blizzard has caused a power outage. Suddenly, shots are heard outside the room and everyone starts to panic. Inside the room, an unknown voice instructs everyone to stop moving and keep their heads down.

It's hard to tell which developments are part of the performance and which are a departure from it. By confusing this crucial distinction, Atwood suggests that the line between theater and life is much less strict than people usually think.

CHAPTER 1. SEASHORE

Felix carefully inserts his false teeth into his mouth, but as usual they don't fit very well. When he smiles, it feels like an "illusion." Once, he would have been able to call upon a fancy dentist who would fix all these problems, but his insurance plan doesn't allow that now. He worries that he will suddenly start lisping during the upcoming performance, rendering himself laughable and disrupting the perfect spell of the theater.

In his first appearance, Felix is worried about the different personas he needs to project: he needs to seem like a powerful man without the weakness of bad teeth, and he needs to be able to act well. At this point, Felix's most prominent character trait is his skill at and preoccupation with creating illusions.

Felix practices his voice exercises in the mirror, feeling how "deflated" and "reduced" his existence now is. He compares himself to Tony, who is flitting from gala to gala, enjoying public approval and praise from people who once gave these things to Felix.

In describing the transformations in his own life, Felix uses very negative rhetoric, initially casting the idea of change as inherently bad.

Standing up straight, Felix examines the paunch that he's just starting to develop. He sternly orders himself to put aside self pity. There's a lot to do, "plots to be plotted" and "villains to be misled." Finishing his exercises, he reassures himself that he still has his voice and the power to accomplish what he wants. He can still "make magic."

Saying that he's going to make magic, Felix aligns himself with Prospero, the wizard protagonist of The Tempest. He also suggests that his work in the theater is largely illusion and fantasy, which clashes with his later assertions that it's deeply tied to real life.

CHAPTER 2. HIGH CHARMS

Felix knows that Tony's rise to power is partly his own fault. He never supervised him properly, and he always trusted his loyalty. However, he excuses his thoughtlessness with the fact that, at the time, he was overcome by grief at the death of his only child. He pulls away from this painful thought, telling himself to pretend it's "only a movie."

Felix tells himself to pretend that his daughter's death is part of a performance—but since performances are the most important part of his life, this doesn't necessarily make it seem less real.

Even if Felix hadn't been thus weakened, Tony probably still would have "ambushed" him. Felix always left all the practical and mundane details of the show to Tony, while he focused exclusively on his role as Artistic Director, creating "the lushest, the most beautiful, the most awe-inspiring" theatrical productions that wowed audiences and turned the Makeshiweg Festival into one of the most prominent theater festivals in the country.

One of the consequences of Felix's fall from grace is that he's able to analyze what he once did wrong. Already it's evident that he's much different than the arrogant director he's describing right now. Although he can't see it yet, this change has had positive effects on him.

To create these spectacles, Felix had to hire the best actors, set designers, and **costume** makers. For this, he needed large budgets, and drumming up money was Tony's gift. Felix always thought of this as a lesser talent, only a small contribution to his productions. He thought of himself as a "cloud-riding enchanter" while Tony was an "earth-based factotum."

Making moral or character judgments based on the different jobs people have is one of the things Felix will encourage his prisoner students not to do. It's also one of the reasons they are so resentful of the politicians who eventually come to see their production.

He now knows that this was idiotic. Tony had slyly encouraged Felix to stay away from festival cocktail parties and events that catered to donors and the Board—taking on all these duties himself so that Felix had more time to focus on the productions, or on the central roles that he sometimes took for himself.

In a sense, Tony outwits Felix by encouraging him to think that the artistic concerns of theater and the mundane logistical details of real life never overlap or affect each other.

Tony even encouraged Felix to put on productions that created a stir among audiences and the Board, such as a production of *Titus Andronicus* with a naked and copiously bleeding Lavinia, or *Pericles* staged in outer space. Felix is never perturbed by bad reviews, which he views as evidence of audience participation. Now he sees those productions as "flights of fancy" only possible for an "earlier Felix." Just before Tony's coup, everything changed for him.

While Felix has always been a good director, the careless way he describes his past plays differs from the seriousness with which he treats his current production of The Tempest, even if it takes place in a prison. What makes a play meaningful isn't where it's staged but what ideas it communicates.

First to "leave" Felix is his wife Nadia, who dies of an infection just after giving birth. He often tries to remember her, but she fades away quickly, leaving him to take care of his newborn daughter, Miranda. This task is the only thing that keeps him from succumbing to grief, although he has a lot of help. Since he doesn't know the first thing about childcare, he hires nannies and babysitters to take care of her while he's at work.

Even though Nadia is a minor character in the novel, her sudden death highlights the extent to which Felix's life is defined by loss. Even his relationship with Miranda is couched in terms of a response to grief.

Even though he doesn't have a lot of time to spend with her, Felix is enthralled by Miranda. He even takes her to the theater, where she sits quietly, unlike "lesser" toddlers. He makes plans to travel with her when she's older and teach her everything he knows. But, at the age of three, she suddenly contracts meningitis. Her nanny isn't even able to reach him on the phone, since he's in rehearsal with orders not to be interrupted. By the time he gets to the hospital, Miranda is already dead.

Felix's relationship towards Miranda is the most sympathetic aspect of his character—while he can be devious and self-centered at other times, here he emerges as a flawed but devoted parent, trying to do his best amid difficulties.

Felix refuses to believe that Miranda is actually gone from the universe. He recalls all the lost Shakespearean daughters and thinks that if some of them returned to their fathers, his Miranda should as well.

As a director, Felix knows better than anyone else that theater rests on illusion—however, he also wants to believe that its magic can extend to real life.

In order to "transform, or at the very least enclose" his sorrow, Felix devotes himself to a new production of *The Tempest*, which he believes will be a "reincarnation" of Miranda. Through the play, he can imagine his daughter growing up into a beautiful young woman, always a companion for her father. He vows to create the most spectacular setting possible for his "reborn" Miranda, outdoing himself in every way. He imagines Ariel as "a transvestite on stilts" and searches out a talented child gymnast named Anne-Marie Greenland to play Miranda, hoping that her performance will be so "fresh" as to actually seem real.

Although Felix hates the changes that Tony wreaks in his life, he recognizes the need to transform himself in order to survive—and he knows the power of theater to achieve personal transformation. However, when he uses words like "reborn," he seems to invest theater with the power to work miracles as well. Felix constantly fluctuates between viewing theater as fabrication and as something directly tied to real life.

Felix himself will play Prospero; through the play he can be the protective and wise father that, in real life, he wasn't. For the wizard's famous **magic garment**, he decides on a cape made of unstuffed plush toys – fake rabbits, lions, tigers, and bears. The costume will reflect Prospero's "supernatural but natural" abilities. He believes that *The Tempest* will be the best play he's ever done, although in retrospect he knows that his obsession with it was self-destructive, as it could never actually bring Miranda back to him.

This garment is an obviously fake representation of something real and recognizable. In this sense, it reflects the fact that while theater is obviously a manufactured spectacle, it's also scarily capable of recreating and affecting the real world.

CHAPTER 3. USURPER

Felix is about to begin rehearsals for *The Tempest* when Tony makes his coup. During a regular Tuesday meeting, Felix is starting to list off his demands and concerns when Tony, dressed in a fancy suit and "foppish" tie, abruptly says he has bad news. He's just been to a Board meeting; Felix always skips these because the chair, Lonnie Gordon, is such a long-winded bore.

Even though he's a master of theatrical illusion, in his personal life Felix is naively convinced that appearances must reflect reality—he can't conceive that someone with bad taste, like Tony, is capable of outwitting an aesthetic genius like him.

Felix asks what's wrong, not particularly interested, because he knows that Tony will take care of everything; he assumes it's some small matter, like a disgruntled playgoer who got fake gore splashed on their clothes. However, Tony, barely hiding his smile, says that the Board has voted to fire Felix from his position as Artistic Director.

Felix has always been certain that his aesthetic dream-world and Tony's mundane real life will never collide—however, Tony's coup shows him that this collision is not only possible but necessary. Ultimately, this will broaden Felix's ideas about the nature and possible applications of theater.

Felix thinks Tony is joking; he created the festival, after all, and without him it would hardly have achieved the wild success it enjoyed today. Tony explains that the Board thinks that he's been "losing his edge" since Miranda's death. He assures Felix that he pled with the Board on his behalf, but Felix knows he is lying. Everyone else on the Board is too spineless to decide on an action like this without Tony's prompting.

One of the cruelest parts of Tony's ambush is his use of Felix's grief against him. Here, Tony casts grief as a weakness, something that prevents him from being a good director. However, it's partly Miranda's memory that will drive Felix to create the spectacular production of The Tempest he stages in the prison.

Tony says that Felix's "contact with reality" is becoming impaired by his grief. For the Board, Felix's recent decision to cast Caliban as a paraplegic, and his cape made of stuffed animals, are evidence of his declining faculties. Furthermore, the festival reviews from the last year have been mixed, showing that Felix isn't able to please audiences as he once did. Tony hands Felix a letter enclosing his retirement package, saying he tried to make it bigger. Felix thinks he's smirking.

In fact, grief does eventually alter Felix's "contact with reality" when he starts to believe that Miranda is appearing to him. However, neither he nor Atwood state explicitly whether he's deluding himself or actually perceiving his daughter's spirit. In this sense, author and protagonist evince a much more flexible conception than Tony of what constitutes "real life."

Felix is in shock. He asks if he can at least finish his production of *The Tempest*, realizing that at this point he's basically begging. Tony says that the Board wants "a clean break." Not only is the production cancelled, Felix must surrender his security pass and clear out his personal stuff right away. Felix says that he's going to take the matter to the Heritage Minister, but he knows this is an empty threat—he and Sal O'Nally have disliked each other since they went to high school together, and the Minister has disparaged the Makeshiweg Festival in several interviews. Tony says smoothly that Sal is in full accord with the Board's decision.

Tony is already fusing his job in the festival with his political aspirations by drawing Sal O'Nally into his plots. He thinks that he can vanquish Felix by venturing into the political world, where his boss has little experience. However, Felix will use the rules of Tony's new sphere to get back at him—again, showing how his fall from power eventually broadens his own horizons.

Felix asks who his replacement will be, and Tony admits that the Board has asked him to take over the Festival. He says it's only an interim appointment, but Felix knows that he's been "the implementer start to finish." He calls Tony a "devious, twisted bastard," but name-calling brings him small satisfaction.

Even though Felix later uses words—including curse words—to empower the prisoners he teaches, his own words feel powerless right now.

CHAPTER 4. GARMENT

Just then, two security guards enter the room, evidently waiting on Tony's command. Despite Felix's protests, Tony has him escorted out into the rain to his car, where he finds a stack of boxes. Without saying anything, the guards help Felix load them into the car; Felix doesn't even know what's inside them, and he feels it can't be that important. He considers dumping everything on the ground and burning it, but he knows this would just confirm Tony's argument that he's mentally unstable.

While Felix isn't being actively jailed here, Tony is using physical force to restrain and humiliate him. It's these experiences that build Felix's sense of being imprisoned by Tony, and which make him especially pleased when he's finally able to corner his nemesis within an actual prison.

Felix sees the Board's chairman, Lonnie Gordon, shuffling towards him with an umbrella. Weakly, he tells Felix that he didn't vote for the termination, and that he's sorry; Felix is too angry and disgusted to reply. In a plastic bag, Lonnie is carrying the **animal skin cape**, which he gives to Felix. While it would have looked fantastic onstage, it's pathetic in the rain. Lonnie is truly upset at this new development, and actually looks like he might cry.

Sometimes the magic cape connotes grandeur and power, but other times it's just pathetic—much like Felix himself. Right now, Felix views the cape's changeability as evidence of its fundamental uselessness, but later he will see its ability to mutate as evidence of valuable complexity.

Lonnie gives Felix his annotated script of *The Tempest* as well, but Felix sneers that he'll never need it again; his career is ruined, and both Lonnie and Tony know it. Known as an eccentric and already over fifty, it's too late for him to start over again. Relenting somewhat, Felix thanks Lonnie for the effort; he feels that the old man will soon be pushed out under Tony's new regime.

Here, Felix shows an absolute lack of belief in the power of personal transformation: he is the way he is, and will never be able to start on any new path. However, as the novel goes on, he will completely disprove his own hypothesis.

Lonnie advises Felix to take a rest, especially after his two recent losses. He came to both Nadia's and Miranda's funerals, and was genuinely upset each time. Felix thanks him sincerely. The security guards tell him to drive safely, and wish him luck. They probably know better than Felix how it feels to be fired. Felix drives away from the festival, "into the rest of his life."

Lonnie is a well-intentioned and kind character, but Felix disregards his good qualities because he has no power to help him. It's important that the next time Felix finds himself in a position of power, he will have come to value Lonnie's character regardless of its utility.

CHAPTER 5. POOR FULL CELL

Driving away, Felix feels so numb that it's as if someone else is driving his car. He soon passes the theater and Makeshiweg's idyllic main street full of expensive restaurants and old-timey pubs, and drives through humbler strip malls full of drugstores and cheap nail salons. After some time, he's simply driving through the country, land he's never seen before. All around him are beautiful fields and orchards. Felix realizes that this might be the place for him; he wants somewhere to hide out for a while, to wait out the embarrassing stories that Tony will plant about him in the newspapers. He doesn't want any reporters to call him or follow him to his house.

Felix's drive away from the wealthy town reflects the change that's occurring in his own life, now that he's no longer a member of the privileged artistic class. However, it's important that this change isn't couched in entirely negative terms – Felix may not lunch in expensive restaurants anymore, but he's forced to experience the natural beauty for which he's never had time before.

Driving on, Felix spots a tiny cabin built into the earth, set far away from the road. He parks the car, walks down an old path, and examines the creaky door and low ceiling, sniffing the earthy smell of the interior. There's no furniture or running water, only a hand pump and an outhouse outside. He decides to find the owner and rent the place.

In The Tempest, Prospero is forced into exile by his brother; it's notable that while Tony fires Felix, the director exiles himself. The imprisonment Felix will suffer through the next years is largely due to his own pride and obstinacy.

Felix knows that choosing to martyr himself in this primitive shack is an act of sulking, but he doesn't have any other options. He certainly can't immediately find another job with the status and benefits he's accustomed to—especially not with Tony and Sal aligned against him. More importantly, he doesn't want to give them the satisfaction of watching him try.

Right now, Felix's pride is both very strong and very powerless—the only way he can express his sense of dignity is by subjecting himself to privations and exile. Later, he will channel these feelings into an act of vengeance that benefits both himself and those around him.

Felix drives back to the rented cottage where he currently lives. Ever since he's lost his family, he prefers not to invest too much energy in a home of his own. He only has a few pieces of furniture that Nadia once picked out and a small photograph of Miranda, laughing wildly on a swing. Now, since his production of *The Tempest* is canceled, she'll have to stay behind the glass forever. He wishes that Tony at least allowed him to say goodbye to the actors and the stage hands, who will be disappointed at losing their work.

Felix's feeling that the canceled production actively harms Miranda reflects his latent belief that producting the play might really have brought her back in some way. It's also interesting that Felix describes his living arrangements as devoid of any familial atmosphere; his language here is similar to his later description of the prison as "motherless."

Felix calls a moving company to pack up his things and sets off to find the owner of the shack. He drives to the closest farmhouse, where an initially suspicious woman answers the door; but when Felix tells her he's been ill and wants to rent it, her demeanor changes immediately. The woman, whose name is Maude, invites him to sit at the kitchen table, telling him how her husband Bert can never make enough money as a truck driver. Hippies have occasionally lived in the cabin before, and she says that Felix should not pay attention to the rumor that it's haunted.

It's clear that Maude really does believe the house is haunted, which is ironic because Felix will come to sense the ghostly presence of his daughter there, but for him that's one of the cottage's main attractions. Maude wants to maintain strict distinctions between what is real and what isn't, while Felix wants those distinctions to collapse in order to preserve his connection to Miranda.

Felix and Maude agree that he can live in the shanty and improve it as he sees fit, in exchange for a small rent in cash. Maude and Bert will plow the lane and supply wood for the stove. In turn, he stipulates that she not tell anyone about him. She clearly thinks he's a criminal, but says he can trust her, and he believes her. When she asks what name she should give if anyone asks, Felix tells her he is "Mr. Duke."

Felix's alias strengthens his ties to Prospero, who is the Duke of Milan. His choice reflects the extent to which he considers his real life a kind of play, in which he's sometimes the director in charge and sometimes —as in the present moment—a powerless actor.

CHAPTER 6. ABYSM OF TIME

Felix soon realizes that the world hardly notices his disappearance. In fact, the festival seems to go on perfectly well with Tony at the helm. He imagines people speculating about him, wondering if he's had a breakdown or committed suicide; however, he knows that soon other ordinary issues will drive him from everyone's mind.

One of the most traumatic aspects of losing his job is realizing that this change is monumental only for him – now that he realizes his work isn't as important as he once thought, he has to find a new sense of purpose.

Felix makes a bank account and rents a PO box in a nearby town, setting them up under the name F. Duke. The new alias gives him a sense of possibility; he feels that more things are possible to F. Duke than Felix Phillips. Maude, Bert, and their children Walter and Crystal know him only by this assumed name.

The persona of F. Duke is a kind of costume for Felix, like the stage names he will encourage his actors to discuss. Although it's a lie, it also allows him to access the determination and grit which, as Felix Phillips, he doesn't think he possesses.

Sometimes Felix amuses himself by imagining Maude as Sycorax, the witch from *The Tempest*, and Walter as her son Caliban. However, the analogies never seem real; for example, Crystal is too "podgy" to be anything like Miranda, and there's no one to stand in for Ariel. Felix pays Bert to install an electrical cable in the cottage, which he uses for a small stove and fridge. He feels that if Maude's family has any relationship to *The Tempest*, they are "lesser elementals, a source of power."

The failure—or perhaps the evident falsity—of Felix's imaginings here suggests that theater can't always be viewed as a blueprint for one's actions in real life. This is a sharp contrast to later events in the plot, when the people around Felix will seem to perfectly reflect and mimic their counterparts in The Tempest.

Having settled into his new accommodations, Felix doesn't know what to do with himself. He tries to avoid theater news but always finds himself buying the papers to read the reviews. He cleans the cabin thoroughly and installs Miranda's photo on the nightstand, but he still sleeps badly.

What Felix really lacks right now is a sense of purpose. His growing feelings of revenge will fill that void for a time, but Felix will eventually see that they can't satisfy him indefinitely.

To fill his time, Felix slogs through Russian novels checked out from the library, but he's discouraged by all the tragedy they contain; instead, he begins to read children's books in which everything turns out well. The librarian assumes that he reads to his grandchildren, and he doesn't correct her.

Like a children's novel, The Tempest is a play in which everything turns out well in the end; however, especially in Felix's production, it also lays bare the maneuvering and illusion necessary to engineer such a satisfactory ending.

After a while this too grows boring, and Felix spends increasing amounts of time sitting on a deck chair and staring into space. When he gets too restless among the bird songs and chirping crickets, he drives into town and makes a small purchase from the hardwood store. He wonders if people talk about him, or consider him an eccentric. He thinks he doesn't care if they do, but this makes him wonder what exactly he does care about, now that he no longer has an occupation or a family.

For Felix, who has always been a highly driven man, not caring about anything is the most frightening possibility of all. In this sense, even though grief and revenge are negative feelings, they also save him from true apathy.

Felix thinks about traveling, but knows it would be lonely and pointless. He knows he could have a fling with a middle-aged woman, but it would probably be pointless for both of them. He could develop a hobby or join a club, but clubs and hobbies repulse him. He could drown in the lake or shoot himself. When he has these thoughts, he dismisses them as "idle speculation," but they still disturb him.

Felix hates the idea of sinking into conventional middle age, which he thinks of in the most reductive and clichéd terms. By the end of the novel, he'll have changed his opinions on this subject.

Felix decides he needs something on which to focus. There are two "projects" that appeal to him. First, he wants to stage his *Tempest* and release Miranda from "her glass coffin." Secondly, he wants to get revenge on Tony; by this time, he daydreams about vengeance constantly. Both of these things seem more imperative to him everyday, but he doesn't know how to accomplish them.

Imagining Miranda as imprisoned somewhere, Felix avoids acknowledging the finality of her death. While imprisonment is usually viewed as highly negative, when it comes to Felix's relationship with Miranda it's somewhat hopeful, because it at least implies the possibility of release.

CHAPTER 7. RAPT IN SECRET STUDIES

Felix decides to concentrate on revenge first. All the plans that come to mind seem impractical; he can't just lure Tony into a dark basement and kill him, and he can't imagine seducing his "robotic" wife. He fantasizes about poisoning him, but knows he doesn't have the resources to accomplish this.

Felix only imagines the most drastic and absurd forms of revenge. Here, ideas cadged from the theater prove useless; however, when he starts thinking in a more nuanced fashion, he will be much more successful.

In order to be better informed, Felix starts to track Tony's movements as much as possible. It's easy to do this because Tony is hungry for achievements and always makes sure they make it into the newspapers. Felix can often read interviews with him or accounts of his presence at various galas. He even gets awards for programs that Felix conceived, like busing local kids to see Shakespeare productions at the festival.

Tony's transformations throughout the novel are always presented as disingenuous and false—there's no suggestion that he's actually interested in allowing underprivileged children to see Shakespeare. In this sense he contrasts with Felix, who really does positively transform his character and try to help others along the way.

Six years after Felix loses his job, Tony leaves the festival and runs for political office, winning a seat in the provincial legislature, where he works alongside the Heritage Minister Sal O'Nally. Felix's spying is further facilitated with the advent of Google. He starts hanging around a local internet café and eventually buys a computer for his own cabin to browse in privacy. He's shocked by how much information he can glean, from his remote cabin, about Tony's and Sal's activities. Still, he doesn't know why he's gathering all this information or what "justice" he's waiting for.

It's interesting that both Felix's profession—theater—and Tony's—politics—depend on casting illusions. However, while Felix's illusions generally reveal some truth about real life or help people improve themselves, Tony's serve only himself and often harm his constituents, like the prisoners. Again, Tony's character helps define the difference between positive and negative transformations.

In fact, Felix's growing obsession with spying is less insane than another development in his life. For years he's been counting how old Miranda would be now, had she lived, and daydreaming that she's still with him. From there, it's only a few steps to actually believing that she's invisibly keeping him company. Again, he checks out children's books from the library, but this time he reads them aloud. Intellectually he knows that she's not present, but it's comforting to think that she is.

It's never clear how much Felix believes in his own imaginings—he simultaneously says he believes that Miranda is keeping him company and promises that he knows this isn't true. Miranda's presence is the novel's biggest illusion, and it suggests that the purpose of illusions isn't just to make people believe something false but to challenge ideas of what exactly constitutes reality.


In the years when Miranda would have been in elementary school, Felix "helps" her with homework and quizzes her on multiplication tables. He starts to cook meals for her, which helps him remember to eat. She always tells him to finish the food on his plate. A little later, he teaches her chess, which she takes to immediately. He never displays his latent anger to her; whenever he's stalking Tony on the computer and muttering plans for revenge, she's somewhere far away.

Miranda's presence in the cabin is at least partly a function of Felix's grief. Although grief is usually considered a negative emotion—not least by Felix himself—in this sense it saves him, forcing him to cook for himself and giving him a sense of purpose. Atwood presents grief as experience to learn from and even appreciate, not just to overcome.

Usually, she plays outside all day. When Felix hears birds squawking in the forest, he assumes Miranda has provoked them. In the winter she goes outside without warm clothes, but she never gets sick. In fact, she's much healthier than Felix. She never asks him why they're living in this tiny house, so far from town. When one day Felix actually hears her singing outside the house, he's frightened that his daydreams are becoming too strong. He thinks that he needs to pull himself together and find a "real-world connection."

Felix is conflicted between wanting Miranda's presence to continue and wanting to preserve his sanity, in the conventional sense of the word. It's also interesting that Miranda's presence helps validate his odd existence, since she thinks of it as normal. Later on in the novel, the concerns she poses to him will inspire him to change, rather than maintain, his lifestyle.

CHAPTER 8. BRING THE RABBLE

When Felix has been out of work for eight years and Miranda is twelve, he finally takes another job. In a local paper's advertisements, he finds a notice for a job with the Literacy Through Literature program at the nearby **Fletcher County Correctional Institute**. He uses Mr. Duke's email to send a cover letter and largely forged resume testifying to his experience teaching in high schools.

Felix completely misrepresents himself in his application—he's already turning this job into a kind of play, with his own comeback as its subject. However, this series of lies has positive results, both for Felix himself and the prisoners he teaches.


Almost immediately, Felix is granted an interview. He buys a new shirt and trims his beard, hoping to appear "sage." In a McDonald's near the **prison**, a middle-aged woman named Estelle conducts the interview. She's a professor who supervises many of the academic courses offered at the prison, and she's used her political connections to spearhead and gain funding for the Literacy Through Literature program.

In dressing for his interview, Felix is hoping to put forth a persona different than his usual one—in essence, he's donning a costume. However, although Felix doesn't believe it now, he eventually will prove a sage teacher. In this sense, the costume isn't a lie but a reflection of a previously unknown aspect of his character.

Estelle immediately ferrets out Felix's real identity; she's been attending plays at the festival since she was a child. He tells Estelle that he's adopted an alias in order to avoid been seen as "overqualified" by the hiring committee, and tells her that she can be his "confidante." Obviously warming to this, she says it's an honor to be able to work with him.

Felix is speaking this way in order to manipulate Estelle into liking him. This demonstrates both his desire to distance himself from her and his belief that she wouldn't like him for his merits alone—both feelings that will change by the end of the novel.

Estelle warns Felix that he won't receive a large salary, and that the work will be difficult: he'll be teaching convicted criminals who lack the basic literacy skills to get jobs upon reentry. Felix reassures her that he relishes the challenge, and tells her that as a director he's used to handling different personalities. Anyway, in Shakespeare's day most of the actors would have been shady characters, considered "next door to criminals."

Felix thinks of himself as taking on this job for purely selfish reasons—to keep a connection to the real world, and eventually to facilitate his revenge. However, at this point he doesn't know if it will accomplish either of those goals, and as Estelle points out he really is doing a good deed. Moments like this suggest that Felix is a better man than he thinks he is.

Seeing that Estelle is impressed with him, Felix stipulates his own conditions. He's uninterested in teaching the usual novels and short stories offered by the **prison** course, and announces that he's going to offer a course on Shakespeare. Estelle is leery of this idea, telling him that Shakespeare is much too complicated for men who can barely read. Felix reminds her that Shakespeare's actors may not have been able to read themselves; they memorized only their own lines and improvised frequently. Estelle says that Shakespeare is "such a classic," but Felix counters that the playwright had "no intention of being a classic;" he was just writing the plays he thought would be most popular.

Felix's small speech about Shakespeare is a reminder that the playwright wasn't always considered "great art"; in his own era, he was just a writer of popular plays which people liked because they explored real feelings and concerns. In doing so, Felix is collapsing a distinction between high-brow theater and the emotions and problems that drive real life—a distinction which, he argues, is imposed only in recent years and ignores the actual history and content of these plays.

Trying to sound authoritative, Felix states his belief in "hands-on" education and says that he will stage Shakespeare productions with the prisoners as actors. He even says that he'll get them to write essays about the plays he chooses. Estelle clearly doesn't believe he can accomplish this, but she gives him three weeks to try.

Felix doesn't actually know what he's talking about—he's merely acting out the part of a confident teacher. However, by doing so he actually becomes one, suggesting that acting isn't necessarily just an illusion.

While Felix's first three weeks are indeed difficult, and he once has to threaten to quit, his class ends up a roaring success. Writing and reading scores improve, and the second time he offers the class there's a waiting list of people who want to be involved. Estelle is getting a lot of credit for Felix's work in the outside world, but he doesn't care because once again he's subsumed in the world of the theater, feeling purposeful for the first time since his firing.

When it allowed Tony to overcome him, Felix's lack of concern for anything outside of the theater was presented as a weakness. However, now it's endearing—he doesn't care if his work seems fashionable or if it garners accolades because he genuinely adores Shakespeare, no matter where he's staging it.

Now Felix has been teaching his course for three years. He chooses his plays carefully, usually political dramas with violence and treachery that feel relatable and interesting to his students. They always have strident opinions about how the heroes could have managed their lives better and avoided their inevitable doom: Richard III assassinates too many allies, and Macbeth trusts the witches too much. Felix stays away from romantic comedies, which would prove unappealing, and tragedies that are too depressing.

The prisoners' investment in the plays disproves Estelle's assertion that, as "classics," they will be inaccessible to people who aren't highly educated. Ironically, it's the very people who haven't been taught to appreciate Shakespeare who most quickly realize the parallels between his plays and their own lives.

Felix uses the same method to teach each play. He gives each student a shortened text and a glossary that he himself compiles. When the class first meets, they talk over the "keynotes" of the play. Next, Felix instructs the students to compile a list of swear words from the play itself; these are the only curses they're allowed to use during the class. The game encourages them to interact with the text, and Felix rewards those who are most successful with cigarettes smuggled into the prison at the end of the course.

Felix's emphasis on swear words isn't just a game—it also helps the prisoners feel less intimidated by the text and more cognizant of the fact that Shakespeare plays were written as popular culture.

At this point, the class analyzes each character one by one, discussing what "makes them tick" and what their motivations are. Felix never has to say anyone is wrong, because with Shakespeare there's always more than one answer. Each main character gets a team of prisoners who work as actor, understudy, prompter, and costume designer. As long as they don't change the plot, they can rewrite the parts to be more modern. After the play has been performed, each team has to write an "afterlife" for its character, predicting what happens to it in the world after the play.

All of these aspects of Felix's teaching practice encourage the prisoners to interact with the play, rather than viewing it as unalterable or static. Felix puts forward a concept of theater that is living and evolving—a concept that is very interesting given his suspicion of transformation when it happens to him or the people around him.

After studying the text, the prisoners rehearse the play, create a soundtrack, and make **costumes** from materials Felix brings from the outside—obeying all the prohibitions against sharp objects. Since there are rules against gathering the entire inmate population for assemblies, the prisoners film each scene and compile the play digitally—allowing Felix to assure his superiors that the students are learning marketable videography skills.

For the first time in his life, Felix is responsible not just for the aesthetic design of the play but all the boring logistics of putting it together—he has to take on Tony's old role as well as his own. However, this doesn't hamper his work but enlarges his sense of what is necessary to staging a play.

When everything is finished, the play is shown via closed-circuit TV in every cell. Felix watches with the Warden and other guards, always happy to hear cheers and applause coming over the intercom. The prisoners love the fight scenes—which, Felix knows, is why Shakespeare included them in the first place. It's not the professional work Felix is used to producing, but he feels that the prisoners show more emotion and enthusiasm than any actors he's worked with before.

Inevitably, Felix's production is informed by the fact that it takes place in a prison. However, while Felix initially sees this as a limiting factor, he eventually comes to realize that the actors' imprisonment adds a different and unique dimension to their work. Throughout the novel Atwood works to cast imprisonment not as a hopeless condemnation but as a trauma, and a potentially informative life experience.

After the screening, Felix throws a cast party with potato chips, soda, and contraband cigarettes. Everyone likes to watch the last part of the video, to see their names roll in the credits. The actors congratulate each other, and Felix is touched to see that "for once in their lives they loved themselves."

Allowing the prisoners to express and be recognized for their talent, Felix is providing the validation and humanization which they crave—and which, as the politicians' eventual visit will show, they are denied by the political establishment and society in general.

Felix lives for the three months during which he teaches his class. But during the rest of the year, he continues to question what exactly he's doing with his life and what's happening to him. He still longs for his vengeance, but he doesn't know how this new occupation will help him attain it.

Even though Felix has a new sense of purpose, his old desire for vengeance isn't gone—Atwood thus dispenses with the notion that old grudges can be totally erased by a new occupation, and acknowledges that vengeance can be one of the most compelling and long-lasting human emotions.

CHAPTER 9. PEARL EYES

Today marks the beginning of the fourth iteration of Felix's class, and he's nervous—despite his previous success, he knows he could still mess things up. He trims his beard, hoping it creates a "magisterial" effect, and puts on the dark green shirt and tweed jacket he always wears to the **prison**. These clothes encourage the prisoners to think of him as a "genial but authoritative retired teacher and theatre wonk," someone respectable but unthreatening.

It's interesting that Felix sees himself as deviously playing the part of a harmless old theater teacher, because by the end of the novel that's exactly what he becomes—and while he currently craves more power and influence than he has, he'll eventually be comfortable and content in this new role.

Felix uses this persona to keep himself aloof from the prisoners' lives and personal arguments. He always tells them to forget about their "daily selves" when they enter the classroom. Everyone obeys—they have so few choices in their lives, and they want to preserve this one gift that they've been accorded. Felix never says so out loud, but he always manages to suggest how privileged they are to work with him.

Felix tells his students to forget about themselves as a way to maintain discipline, but it's also a promise of transformation, from a despised prisoner to a valued actor. This is probably one of the reasons Felix's class is so popular: he actively validates the prisoners' humanity, and makes them feel like they are men with skills and responsibilities that others care about.

When Felix turns, he can see Miranda sitting at the table. She's sad because he's going to be away from home so much. He reassures her that he's not in this job for the money, wanting her to think of him as noble and unselfish. Miranda is a teenager now, beautiful but very pale from being cooped up in the house. She worries about Felix when he's away, making him tea when he gets home and insisting on cooking healthy dinners.

Although Felix still wants Miranda to be with him, her pallor suggests that this kind of half-life isn't very healthy for her. Felix feels like he's taking care of his daughter, but Miranda's presence in the cabin is really of more benefit to him.

If Miranda were alive, she would be acting out and pushing him away, but in this form "she remains simple, she remains innocent." Still, Felix thinks she's been in a bad mood for a while and wonders if she's fallen in love with someone. He tells her to be good and practice her math while he's gone. She always obeys him and never goes far from the house—"something constrains her" from doing so.

Felix takes comfort in the fact that Miranda never changes—while she grows up physically, she maintains the childlike simplicity that Felix knew during her actual life. However, eventually he'll come to realize that this lack of change isn't natural at all.

Felix prepares to brave the snow and coax his car to start—he's long replaced the convertible he once drove, but this secondhand Peugeot often malfunctions. His road is rough and only used by the school bus—a bus that Miranda might have ridden, had she lived. He can't find his scarf, until Miranda reminds him that he's put it in the armoire. When he opens the door, he suddenly comes upon the **animal skin cape** he prepared for his aborted role as Prospero. Once the "cloak of his defeat," it's now "transforming itself" and "coming alive." He feels sure that it's almost time to don the cape again.

The last time Felix saw the magic cape, it reminded him of everything he'd lost in Tony's coup. However, now it's a symbol of the power he once had and could wield again. The cape continues to reflect Felix's different personas. While he may toggle between contradictory roles, he's not pretending or falsifying himself—he's just exploring the complexities of his character.

CHAPTER 10. AUSPICIOUS STAR

Shoveling the snow off his car, Felix feels his advancing age. However, eventually he gets it going and drives out of the driveway, feeling more prepared than he has all morning.

Age is another transformation that Felix hopes to forestall; however, he has to acknowledge that this kind of change is both natural and inevitable.

Felix remembers an email he received from Estelle a month ago, inviting him to lunch. Felix accepts, although he always worries that he will succumb to her flirtatious attitude. Although he likes her and finds her attractive, "he has a dependent child, and those duties come first." He meets her in Wilmot, a nearby town, and finds Estelle wearing a sparkly necklace and bursting with cheerfulness. She praises Felix's work but he modestly demurs, giving the prisoners all the credit.

Felix's belief that he can't get entangled with Estelle because of Miranda demonstrates that, while grief sometimes helps preserve his sanity, it also prevents him from starting the new life which he so desperately needs.

Excitedly, Estelle tells Felix that she's arranged something special for him. Over the years, she's done lots of favors, like getting funding to pay for props and technical supplies, and getting Felix access to higher-ups in the prison. Now, she tells him that his course is going to be visited by some important politicians, including the Justice Minister—a post now occupied by Sal O'Nally, who has moved up in politics over the years. He's been pushing a "tough on crime" agenda, but his willingness to visit makes Estelle think he's more open-minded than he seems.

Estelle's ability to arrange special favors seemingly out of thin air likens her to Ariel, the magical spirit who helps Prospero. However, while Ariel is in bondage to the wizard, Estelle works of her own accord. Distinctions like this show that although Felix likes to think of himself as similar to The Tempest's protagonist, he doesn't share Prospero's fundamental flaw of imprisoning those around him.

Pretending to be calm, Felix asks who else is coming. He already suspects it's Tony, since his own nemesis has also ascended to federal politics and is often seen alongside Sal. When Estelle confirms his hunch, he pretends to remember him only vaguely and refers to him patronizingly as "my right-hand man." He wonders if he seems agitated; he can't believe how lucky he is to have both his enemies visit him in the one place where he might be able to hold power over them.

Just as Ariel shipwrecks Antonio on Prospero's island, Estelle arranges for Tony to enter Felix's domain. Even though Tony's visit to a shabby prison should be a confirmation of his political triumph over Felix, Felix knows that he can turn it into a moment of revenge. Unlike his nemesis, Felix knows better than to stigmatize—and thus underestimate—prisoners.

Estelle confides that, in political circles, there's been some talk about cutting the Literacy Through Literature program, as many politicians don't see the point. Estelle hopes that this visit might save her "baby," and she's thrilled with the results that Felix has managed to achieve; she's been telling everyone that Felix manages to use the arts in both a "therapeutic and educational" context. Both the Ministers, she says, will want photos with the inmates. Felix nods, but gently refers to them as "actors"—he refuses to call them prisoners while they're in his class.

It's clear that the politicians are visiting the prison solely as a political stunt, not because they feel any compassion for incarcerated people. Moments like this make clear that, in this novel, imprisonment doesn't represent fair punishment for crimes but rather the stark manifestation of social injustice.

Fortunately for Felix, Estelle has kept the secret of his identity from the Ministers, referring to him only as Mr. Duke. When he thanks her gravely, she "twinkles" with pride. The Ministers will be coming, she says, on the day of the performance, and will watch the play on TV with Felix, after which they'll meet with the actors—almost like the premiere of a real play. Knowing that she's craving praise for this coup, Felix tells her she's a "star."

Describing Estelle—whose very name means "star"—as "twinkling" or being a star strengthens her association with Ariel, who is an elemental spirit controlling the weather and the heavens.

Estelle asks Felix which play he's chosen for this year. Although he'd been planning on *Henry V*, just in this moment he changes his mind and announces his intention to stage *The Tempest*. Estelle is visibly disappointed, and he can tell that she's thinking the play is "way too gay." Gently, she points out that the actors have always related best to plays about wars and politics. Felix responds that, as a play about prisons, *The Tempest* will be eminently relatable. To himself, he thinks that it's also a play about revenge.

In settling on The Tempest, Felix picks the play that best reflects the course of his life and the ideas that dominate it. The reader doesn't yet know what he's planning to do, but already Felix is exhibiting a strong faith in the parallels between theater and the events of real life.

Anxiously, Estelle wonders if the Ministers will like his choice of play; she twists her hands in consternation, but Felix reassures her that both the Ministers will "relate" to it as well.

Estelle's worries reflect the sentiments the politicians will display later—that theater is inherently divorced from reality.

CHAPTER 11. MEANER FELLOWS

Felix drives up the hill where the **prison** is located. Snow is still falling, and he worries that one day he'll have a heart attack while shoveling his car out and die alone. The guard, who knows and likes Felix, lets him in cheerfully and Felix enters the prison, which smells like "unloved food eaten in boredom," "dejection," and "motherless years." The atmosphere of the prison is like an "enchantment," one that only Felix is able to lift.

The feelings troubling Felix and the atmosphere of the prison are somewhat similar—isolation from society and lack of family. It's a reminder that like his students, Felix is languishing in a jail of sorts; however, unlike them, he has the power to free himself.

Felix passes through the metal detector, greeting the guards, Dylan and Madison. Neither of him suspect him—a "harmless old thespian"—of smuggling any contraband into the prison. He plays into this impression, smiling foolishly, but he knows it's his words that should worry them the most, and they don't appear on scanners.

Notably, in projecting a persona that differs crucially from his actual character, Felix is behaving very similarly to Tony. However, while he constantly criticizes his nemesis for this behavior, he doesn't see it as problematic in himself.

Madison asks what play Felix will stage this year; the guards enjoy watching the performance as well, and Felix always gives them a special lecture to make them feel included and benevolent towards the project. Madison especially liked *Macbeth*, and Dylan can remember favorite quotes from the play. They both want to see another play about war, and are a little disappointed when Felix mentions *The Tempest*. Dylan asks distrustfully if *The Tempest* has fairies, but Felix explains that he's thinking of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; *The Tempest* has goblins, and he promises they will like it.

The way everyone in the prison becomes enthusiastic about Felix's plays—especially the political dramas—reflects how even plays considered inaccessible can reflect the concerns of real life. Atwood uses moments like this to argue that theater isn't merely aesthetically appealing, but socially useful as well.

Madison asks if *The Tempest* has a fight scene, and Felix says vaguely that there's something of the sort. But when he tells them the play is about revenge, they both perk up; to them, "revenge is a known quantity" and always interesting to hear about. The guards tell Felix they trust him, and give him the security pager he has to wear at all times, and which can summon the guards in case of a problem. Felix knows that there's going to be trouble this year, but not the kind the guards worry about.

Felix is partly emphasizing the importance of vengeance in The Tempest for his own aims—he wants to use the play to effect his own revenge. At the same time, it does bring prisoners and guards together around the unusual play, showing how Felix's pursuit of revenge both displays his own flaws and helps him relate to (and even help) those around him.

CHAPTER 12. ALMOST INACCESSIBLE

The **prison** hallways are nothing like Shakespearean dungeons; rather, they're painted an innocuous light green and seem like they could belong to a university building, except for the utter lack of decoration and their sterile cleanliness. Although the doors are closed, this is not a cellblock but rather the wing where prisoners meet with social workers, priests, and teachers like Felix. Felix doesn't ever interact with these people, whom he thinks of as "moralizing" and judgmental.

One of Felix's good characteristics is that he's not moralizing at all. He never instructs the prisoners about what is right and wrong, possibly because he's very conscious of being driven by "wrong" feelings himself, like his overwhelming desire for revenge. In this sense, while his feelings aren't always very noble, they help him relate to and teach his students effectively.

Many of these workers see Felix as a bad influence, allowing "damaged men" to re-enact scenes of violence and carnage that might reawaken the traumas of their youth. In his head, Felix rails that theater is "the art of true illusions," which performs trauma in order to overcome it. He knows that they would respond by saying he's "too abstract" and naïve about the prisoners' actual mindsets, but he feels confident that he's doing a good thing by allowing them to exercise their hidden talents. However, he never says anything confrontational because he doesn't want to lose his precarious security in the prison.

Describing theater with the oxymoron "true illusion," Felix expresses the uneasy mixture of fantasy and reality that takes place in his staged performances. He also foreshadows the fact that his final production of The Tempest will both create illusions that trick the visiting politicians, and cause them to reveal their true and villainous selves.


In the classrooms where Felix conducts his classes, there are no video cameras—he's insisted that the actors must feel secure and not spied upon. He's never had any serious problems with discipline, and never used his pager. At his disposal he has three small rooms to use for rehearsal, and two "demonstration cells" built for a history course, which the prisoners reinvent as army tents, throne rooms, cages, and dungeons. Staging Lady Macduff's death there was almost too intense; for many prisoners, it triggered flashbacks to violence they experienced as children.

Remembering the problems with filming Lady Macduff's death, Felix gives some credence to the arguments of his opponents. At the same time, by staging plays with tough content like this he's giving the actors a positive outlet through which to explore previous traumas, something seriously lacking in prison life.


The last room on the hall is a large classroom where Felix holds his discussions and lectures. Thanks to Estelle's maneuvering, it has a computer, although no Internet. It's an unassuming room, always smelling slightly bad, but it's also Felix's entire domain—both his "place of exile" and his "theater."

Just like Prospero abandoned on his island, Felix has a small and humble domain through which he manages to exert great power by manipulating the actions of those who arrive there—in essence, accomplishing his goals by enacting a play.


CHAPTER 13. FELIX ADDRESSES THE PLAYERS

Felix stands in in front of his new class. He's never exactly sure who will be there, since dropouts and replacements happen at the last minute, but he sees a good mix of veterans from previous productions and nervous newcomers. The actors' ethnicities are as assorted as the crimes for which they've been incarcerated; their one common trait is their desire to participate in the play.

While Felix is used to working with professional actors, his current cast is actually a better reflection of the productions Shakespeare himself staged, using actors with little training or formal education, who were often considered criminal for their disreputable profession.

Although he never mentions it, Felix knows what crimes each actor has committed—usually gang involvement, drug dealing, and theft. There's even a hacker and a con-man. No one is supposed to take the course more than once, but Felix creates subsidiary classes like "Technology for the Theater" in order to get around this. Repeat participation means that he now has accomplished actors and men skilled in **costume** design, video editing, lighting, and makeup. He sometimes wonders if they will one day put these skills to work in robberies or kidnapping, but he tries not to think about it.

Felix is skilled at balancing his conceptions of the prisoners. Even though he knows exactly what crimes they've committed, he's able to see them in terms of their skills and personalities. With this attitude he extends an opportunity for personal transformation which the men are rarely afforded, in the prison or in the wider society.

Felix can already see the perfect actors for some roles: WonderBoy, a former con artist, would be a perfect Ferdinand, while the hacker, 8Handz, will make a great Ariel. Bent Pencil, an embezzling accountant, can be Gonzalo, while SnakeEye, a Ponzi schemer, can be Antonio. Many men could take Caliban's part, but he'll have to think about that later.

Just as many of the people in Felix's past mirror characters from The Tempest, the prisoners' temperaments and past lives make them seem uniquely suited to certain parts.

Smiling as if he "knows what he's doing," Felix commences the speech he gives each year, welcoming everyone to the Fletcher Correctional Players and reminding them that who they are and what they've done on the outside is irrelevant to their participation in this course. He says they'll be learning Shakespeare because Shakespeare wrote for everyone, "from high to low and back again." While he, Mr. Duke, is the director, the players will work as a team and everyone is responsible for helping the others. By now, the troupe has a reputation to uphold, and Felix wants this year's players to prove as good as the previous ones.

Implying that he doesn't actually know what he's doing, Felix once again suggests that as a teacher he's playing a part, rather than truly expressing himself. However, it's also clear that he does in fact know what he's doing—he runs his class smoothly and confidently, and has already proven himself a success. He's not just impersonating a teacher but has become one; Felix's character is much less static and fixed than he thinks it is.

Felix explains that the actors will be organized into teams for each of the principal characters. He proceeds to explain that the students will collaborate to rewrite parts of the play, as well as to videotape the production. Now, each of the actors has to think about what stage name they will adopt; Felix points out that movie stars and even rappers like Snoop Dog use stage names. The prisoners enjoy this task; they "welcome the return of this other self of theirs, standing there like a **costume**."

Felix doesn't recognize or appreciate transformations when they're happening in his own life—he doesn't see how he's changing, and he's suspicious when people like Tony or Miranda seem to evolve. However, he's astutely aware that the prisoners crave the possibility of transformation, even expressed through something as small as a stage name.

Now, knowing he has to be persuasive, Felix introduces *The Tempest* as this year's play. They've all had time to read the play in advance, but since most of them read at a third-grade level, there's still a lot of work to do. Felix writes the "keynotes" on the board, listing "MUSICAL," "MAGIC," "PRISONS," "MONSTERS," and "REVENGE." All the students are frowning back at him; this play is much different from *Julius Caesar* or *Macbeth*, which they all immediately related to.

Often, Shakespearean theater is regarded as approachable only after years of education and preparation. Felix upends this stereotype, treating it as a means through which one can approach education itself. While he's often snobby, Felix is radical in insisting that theater is not the property of the educated classes, but rather can be enjoyable and beneficial to everyone.

When Felix opens the floor for questions, Leggs—arrested for breaking and entering, now a veteran actor who has played Mark Antony—immediately points out that there's no fighting in the play, and that someone will have to play a fairy. PPod, who has played Lady Macbeth, asserts that he's not going to play a fairy, and many others voice their unwillingness to play Miranda.

The whimsy and idiosyncrasies of The Tempest clash with the ideals of masculinity that the prisoners cling to. However, as the novel progresses, those ideals will prove much more malleable than either they or Felix first believe.

Felix is prepared for this hostility. In previous plays, the only female characters were supernatural or villainous, and thus acceptable to the men. However, no one wants to make himself vulnerable by playing a girl like Miranda. Felix informs the class that he's hiring a female actor to play Miranda. This information impresses the men, who can't believe that an actual woman will be willing to come to the **prison** and be in their play. Seizing his advantage, he says that if anyone acts out, especially towards the actress, the play will be canceled.

In bringing in an outside actress, Felix is furthering his own goal of staging the play in a spectacular fashion. However, he's also doing another kindness to the prisoners by showing them that not everyone is afraid or disdainful of interacting with them and becoming part of their lives.

Now, instead of complaining, the prisoners are making raunchy jokes and speculating about who gets to play Ferdinand. It's only Bent Pencil, always a stickler for tedious details, who reminds the class that someone still has to play Ariel. Felix promises to discuss this later; for now, he wants the prisoners to make a list of curse words, and reminds the class that anyone swearing with words outside the list will lose points and therefore valuable cigarettes. The actors set about the task with gusto, while Felix reflects that it's profanity that is the "hag-born progenitor of literacy."

Felix's emphasis on the curse words is a reminder that Shakespeare's plays are a bewildering mix of high and low art—mixing beautiful prose and complex moral questions with dirty jokes and slapstick humor. By recognizing and valuing this juxtaposition of styles Felix is attacking the elitism that often attends the study and performance of Shakespeare, displaying a mentality diametrically opposed to that of the politicians, who will assert that the prisoners don't "deserve" to perform Shakespeare.

CHAPTER 14. FIRST ASSIGNMENT: CURSE WORDS

When he arrives at the second class two days later, Felix is feeling relaxed and confident. Adopting his "avuncular" voice, he asks a volunteer to read the final list of curse words. Bent Pencil stands and recites them all, from "blasphemous dog" to "insolent noisemaker" to "hag-seed." When Felix asks for questions, Red Coyote takes issue with the fact that that "earth" and "tortoise," both considered sacred to many Native Canadian tribes, are used as insults. 8Handz suggests that this is the result of Prospero's colonialist mindset. Felix says that, in the context of the play, "tortoise" just means a slowpoke.

By discussing the ways in which Prospero's worldview is informed by a sense of racial superiority, 8Handz and Red Coyote are touching on issues that probably influenced Shakespeare as he was writing the play—Britain's new and uncertain role as explorer and colonizer. As such, they show how Shakespeare's concerns remain relevant and gripping in the contemporary age.

Red Coyote contends that no one should use those insults. Someone asks if "shit," which appears in the play, is allowed, but Felix nixes the idea, saying that "too much shit is monotonous, and monotony is anti-Shakespeare." Sweeping away further objections, he announces a spelling quiz.

In their discussion of the insults, the prisoners are both engaging with the play as it was originally written and transforming it into something uniquely their own.

CHAPTER 15. OH YOU WONDER

Felix already knows which actress he wants to play Miranda: Anne-Marie Greenland, the girl he engaged for the part twelve years ago. After much searching on the Internet, he's managed to locate her. She's had a few minor parts in the Makeshiweg festival and in other productions, but never anything big. Felix is angered to learn this, knowing that by canceling the play all those years ago Tony has ruined not only his career but also Anne-Marie's.

At this point, Felix's anger on Anne-Marie's behalf seems mostly like an extension of his own resentment of Tony. However, he will eventually grow genuinely interested in the actress's well-being, independently of its relation to his own.

For the last several years Anne-Marie has worked mostly as a dancer; there are several impressive videos of her on YouTube. Felix wonders if she has a partner or husband, but no such information appears on any of her profiles; although she's no longer a girl, she's still young and wiry enough to play Miranda. Felix has sent her a message via Facebook and, miraculously, she's agreed to meet with him. As it happens, she's working as a barista in a local coffee shop.

By casting Anne-Marie, Felix is trying to make this production of The Tempest as similar as possible to the one he originally planned to stage—resisting the idea of change in himself, the other actors, or his goals.

On the appointed day, Felix picks Anne-Marie up at the coffee shop, making a rare foray into Makeshiweg. They go to a nearby pub, where she orders a burger and fries; Felix remembers his own days as a young actor, when he learned to capitalize on free meals. Anne-Marie distrustfully asks where he's been for the last years, and he vaguely explains that Tony fired him; when he tells her how sorry he is that she never got to act in *The Tempest*, she warms up to him.

Just as when he has lunch with Estelle, Felix is good at speaking to Anne-Marie in a way that makes her like him. In this sense he's much like Prospero, using his abilities to manipulate those around him. However, he'll eventually learn that trying to control other people limits his ability to form sincere relationships with them.

Diving into his plans, Felix announces that he wants Anne-Marie to return to her abandoned role—but this time, in a production at **Fletcher Correctional**. Anne-Marie is highly skeptical of working inside a men's prison, but Felix speaks persuasively, saying that the men are excited to meet her and will behave respectfully. He flatters her by telling her that she still has a "freshness" he wants for his production, and she wryly compares herself to a "new-laid shit."

Anne-Marie's irreverent attitude is similar to that of Felix himself. She's already starting to prove herself the inheritor of his aesthetic sensibilities, paving the way for the father-daughter relationship they'll eventually develop.

Anne-Marie asks if Felix will be taking on the role of Prospero, and he assents. Suddenly, she smiles; saying that Felix is as crazy as he's ever been, she agrees to the plan. He warns her to call him Mr. Duke, never Felix Phillips, and tells her about the prohibition on swearing, which she dubiously accepts. When they shake hands, she has "a grip like a jar-opener."

Anne-Marie's "fresh" and girlish aura contrasts notably with her actual toughness. This makes her both similar and notably divergent from Felix's imagined Miranda, whose character is entirely sweet and innocent.

Felix asks about the meaning behind Anne-Marie's bicep tattoo, a small bee. She explains that after Felix's failed *Tempest* she had a brief relationship with the actor who played Ariel; the bee was an inside joke between them, but she never explains the punch line. Instead, she turns to her burger and begins devouring it.

Just like it was for Felix, the failed production of The Tempest seems to be a source of regret and anxiety for Anne-Marie.

CHAPTER 16. INVISIBLE TO EVERY EYEBALL ELSE

Felix begins his next class by dramatically announcing that he's persuaded an "exceptional" actress to take on the role of Miranda. The players cheer and he loads a clip of Anne-Marie dancing onto the class computer. Everyone is impressed to see Anne Marie in a halter top and shorts, performing a difficult and combative routine with a male partner. Someone says admiringly that "she could tear a whoreson strip off you." When the video stops, the men exhale in unison.

The prisoners like Anne-Marie because she's both attractive and tough in a way they regard as essentially masculine. As such, her respected position among them depends on her possession of both conventionally male and female attributes.

Trying to sound formal and distant, Felix says that Anne-Marie will come to the **prison** for a read-through next week. Still, he can't keep the prisoners from launching into a lively discussion of her physical merits. He warns them not to "cross her," as she's certainly formidable enough to handle them.

Even though he's just trying to maintain a professional atmosphere, Felix is already adopting a paternal attitude towards Anne-Marie—much like Prospero's behavior towards his daughter Miranda.

Felix shifts the discussion to a more difficult topic: who will take on Ariel's part. Several actors immediately say "no way" to the idea of playing a fairy, and someone suggests Felix bring in another actor. Felix understands that no one wants to play a character who seems so obviously gay, especially since Ariel has a song in which he says he "sucks" flowers "like a bee." It's pointless for him to explain the connotations of fairies or even the word "suck" in Shakespearean times.

Felix generally proceeds as if there's no difference between performing Shakespeare in a prison or on a professional stage, but at times he has to confront the challenges specific to this environment. While they may be thoughtful students within Felix's class, in the rest of their lives the prisoners have to maintain tough and disaffected personas.

Instead, Felix encourages the actors to think more "widely" about Ariel. He points out his many superpowers—the spirit can be invisible, can conjure up thunder and wind, and can fly. Most importantly, he's not a human. If they hadn't read the play, Felix asks, and he mentioned such a character, what would they think of? After some muttering, Leggs admits that Ariel sounds somewhat like a superhero. Someone compares him to an alien from *Star Trek*, doing tasks in order to be reunited with his people.

Encouraging the actors to transpose the play's characters into a more modern context, Felix is again embracing the prospect of transformation—not just for the actors, but for the play itself.

Felix encourages the actors to discuss possible **costumes** for Ariel, and PPod suggests green skin and bug eyes; Red Coyote says he's probably a vegan, and would eschew human food. In this way, the actors are able to accept the "bee-sucking" part of the play.

Felix suggests that it's through innovative and modern representations like this that Shakespeare is able to survive and remain relatable through the centuries.

Next Felix asks the class to think about what would happen without Ariel's role in the play. In fact, by summoning Prospero's tempest and creating illusions throughout the play, he emerges as the most important character. In the modern world, he'd be a "special-effects guy" or a "digital expert." 8Handz says that this is "scurvy cool." Felix promises that in this production, the actor who plays Ariel will also be in charge of lighting, sound, and special effects—this adds an additional incentive for someone to take on the job. When he asks who wants to be on Ariel's team, everyone raises his hand.

It's interesting that Felix is able to see Ariel as the play's most important character. After all, he's going to play Prospero, and he has generally considered the play as revolving around the wizard's relationship with his daughter and desire for revenge. This speech suggests that he's broadening his originally solipsistic conception of the play and his own role within it.

CHAPTER 17. THE ISLE IS FULL OF NOISES

When Felix leaves the **prison**, crows watch him start up his car. He drives home absently, feeling relieved that he's finally secured a Miranda and won the actors over to his play. However, when he reaches his cottage, it's depressing to see the darkness inside. He almost knocks on the door before he realizes that no one will answer. A feeling of fresh loss floods him. He reminds himself that it's foolish to imagine Miranda waiting for him.

Felix's sense of purpose and importance within the prison contrasts with his fundamental loneliness at home. Although his job provides some structure to his life, it can't resolve his feelings of grief or his craving for Miranda's appearances.

While preparing a lackluster dinner of eggs and tea, Felix thinks over the plot for revenge he's been hatching. At first it seemed simple: when Tony and Sal visited the **prison**, he would make sure they watched the play not with the Warden but in his own classroom, where they would see another version, with actors "directed and controlled by himself." However, the possibilities of detection are endless, and the actors might get carried away once a "tough-on-crime" politician is at their mercy. He's always told himself that no one will get hurt, but he now realizes he can't make these promises.

When Felix first came up with his plan, he was thinking only about his own goals of revenge. Now, he's worrying about the potential harm it could do both to his actors and his enemies. While these moral doubts won't stop him from carrying out the plan, they do show that he's gradually becoming less self-centered, probably as a result of his work in the prison.

Maybe it would be better to give up his vengeance, and with it his "former self." Felix doesn't even know if his theatrical accomplishments are worth defending in this way, and he knows it's foolish to feel "entitled to special consideration from the universe at large." He wonders if Miranda isn't appearing to him tonight because he's so depressed; he thinks he can hear her humming, but it might just be his tiny fridge.

Felix has always thought of himself as a genius doing irreplaceable work and thus entitled to the privileges which Tony stripped from him. While these new thoughts aren't pleasant, they demonstrate a positive change in Felix's self-conception and character.

In his bedroom, Felix looks at his "**wizard's garment**," which has been waiting so long to be used. Examining it, he knows that he must and can have his time of revenge.

Even though the costume is a reminder of a previous failure, it also spurs Felix to be confident in his new endeavors—maybe the cloak can finally work its "magic."

When Felix returns to the living room, Miranda is sitting in the corner, looking worried. He promises her that nothing bad will happen, and that everything he does is "in care of thee." Even as he says this, he knows he can't really take care of her, or give her all the things that girls her age want and need: pretty clothes, a cellphone, a social life. He's such a terrible parent, and he's grateful that Miranda isn't angry at his failures. He offers her a game of chess; without much enthusiasm, she agrees.

While Felix is beginning to acknowledge that he can't cause any spectacular reincarnation with his production of The Tempest, he still believes that Miranda is appearing to him and that he can care for her. At this point he's conflicted both about how he should express his grief and what his paternal duties are.

CHAPTER 18. THIS ISLAND'S MINE

On Monday, Felix drives to class with his confidence restored. This week he will devote to analyzing the main characters; at the same time, he needs to lay the groundwork for his secret, second play. In order to enact his revenge, he must be alert at all times, since "everything depends on his will."

That Felix's revenge explicitly takes the form of play strengthens the connection between Shakespeare's Prospero, who is only implicitly a playwright, and the world of the theater.

Dylan and Madison have heard that a woman is coming to act in the prison and, like everyone else, they're excited and intrigued. Full of importance, they tell Felix that she'll have to wear a security pager at all times, and wish him luck for the day.

Just like in The Tempest, taking care of and protecting the sole female character is a central concern among all the men in the prison.

In the classroom, Felix starts to explore the history of the island where *The Tempest* takes place. It was first inhabited by Caliban's mother, the witch Sycorax. After she dies, Caliban grows up alone on the island until Prospero arrives and takes it over. Prospero and Caliban get along well until Caliban starts chasing Miranda, after which Prospero enslaves him. Still, he's the character with the most knowledge about and best relationship with the island. Like Sycorax and Caliban, Ariel has lived on the island for a long time, but it's hard to tell what he thinks about his home.

The island's history establishes Caliban and Sycorax as its most longstanding residents, with the best claim to ruling it. However, Caliban is enslaved by Prospero for most of the play. The tension between powerful newcomer and oppressed native reflects the concerns with colonialism which were becoming prominent in England as Shakespeare wrote the play.


The next people to arrive are Prospero, a duke deposed by his brother Antonio, and his baby daughter Miranda. Stranded on the island, they have to live in a cave with no one else for company. Prospero's only goal is to get them off the island, but Miranda is content because she doesn't know anything else.

The island is both a prison and a refuge. Similarly, Felix's cabin is both a trap, preventing him from building a new life, and a haven, providing him access to the memory of his lost daughter.


After twelve years, Prospero uses Ariel to create a large storm that shipwrecks Antonio's boat and lands him on the island, along with the King of Naples, Alonso, and his son Ferdinand, brother Sebastian, and advisor Gonzalo. Believing that Ferdinand has died in the storm, Alonso is devastated; Antonio sees the occasion as an opportunity, planning to murder Alonso so that Sebastian, his ally, can inherit the throne of Naples. Gonzalo, pompous but well-intentioned, bores everyone else by planning an ideal society for the island, in which no one would have to work. All these men are primarily concerned with "who should have power, how they should get it, and how they should use it."

Antonio, Alonso, and Sebastian are all involved in an internal power struggle—just as the politicians who eventually visit, Tony, Sal, and Sebert, are plotting against each other. What Felix doesn't mention is that power is also Prospero's main concern, at least in that he considers himself most deserving of it. In his adaption of the play and behavior offstage, Felix will emerge as markedly different than the protagonist in this respect, while the politicians prove themselves identical to their villainous counterparts.

Separated from the men is Ferdinand, who believes that his father has drowned. Ariel lures him onto another part of the island with music, where he glimpses Miranda and immediately falls in love. For him, the island is "a place of wonder, and then of romantic love."

The Tempest examines the ways in which prisons can prove hospitable and nurturing to their captives—but for Felix's actors, there are few upsides to the modern system of incarceration.

Last and least are Stephano and Trinculo, the rulers' drunken servants. They come across Caliban and seek to turn him into their servant, even planning to sell him once they make it back to Italy. For his part, Caliban tries to entice them into killing Prospero by saying they can have Miranda as their reward. The servants share the unscrupulous natures of Antonio and Sebastian.

With their cruelty undisguised by good manners or social status, the servants highlight the terrible natures of those they serve. However, in Felix's play the politicians will actually unmask themselves with their own actions.

No one seems particularly enthusiastic about all these details. Pausing, Felix posits the idea that the island is like a "mirror," providing each character "a reflection of his inner self." More briskly, he instructs each prisoner to write down each character with a rating indicating how interested they are in each part. For the next few days, everyone will be reading speeches from different characters, after which Felix will make casting decisions.

While Felix is the one who describes the island as a mirror, he's actually the person who emerges as most different from the character he plays. In this sense, the play shows him what he isn't, rather than what he is.

As they write, Felix reflects that besides being a mirror, the island is a theater. Like any director, Prospero is putting on a play, and if he does his work well, he'll achieve everything he wants. When a few actors look up at him, Felix realizes he's been mumbling, and sharply admonishes himself to act normal.

At the end of the play, Prospero is uncertain in his happiness even as he's technically accomplished everything he wanted; he's often said to reflect Shakespeare's anxieties about his own role as a playwright. On the contrary, Felix will be much more content after his own revenge—possibly because he's helped many other people in the process.

CHAPTER 19. MOST SCURVY MONSTER

Only one person wants to play Gonzalo, but fortunately it's Bent Pencil, the very person Felix wanted to cast. Alonso and Sebastian aren't popular with anyone, but lots of people want to play Antonio, Ferdinand, and Ariel. Almost everyone has rated Caliban highly. Felix decides to start with this difficult decision.

Rather than unilaterally making casting decisions, Felix tries to guide the actors into wanting the parts to which they are best suited. While he's still controlling what happens, he's much less tyrannical than Prospero, his inspiration.

Before this discussion, Felix bathes in the cabin; he only does this once a week, because it's so difficult to heat up the water and wash in the cold air. Miranda is never in the cabin when it comes time for his bath; he doesn't know where she goes. Felix wonders how Prospero and Miranda bathed on the island, especially with Caliban lying in wait for Miranda every time she strays from her father. Ariel must have watched over them. Felix muses that all unpleasant bodily functions are omitted in the theater.

In appearing only when it's most convenient for him and decorously staying away when it isn't, Miranda proves herself markedly unlike a real child. Although Felix doesn't articulate this yet, he's not really being a father by "caring for" the invisible Miranda—he's clinging to the memory of something that is long gone.

After bathing, Felix puts on his pajamas and makes a glass of cocoa. Once he's lying in bed, he feels Miranda reappear. He says goodnight, and it feels as though she's brushed his forehead with her hand.

Here, it seems like Miranda is the parent, while Felix is the comforted child. She's clearly more an expression of Felix's grief than a reflection of his actual daughter.

When he arrives at class on Wednesday, Felix asks the actors to imagine the kind of being that Caliban is. The actors describe him as "a monster," "stupid," "evil," and "savage." Faking innocence, Felix asks why they want to play such a nefarious character. Everyone grins, saying that they "get him" and that they understand his desire for revenge on the people who have wronged him.

That the actors all identify with Caliban's most nefarious attributes suggests the low esteem in which they hold themselves. However, by analyzing the ways in which Caliban is demonized by his circumstances and making him into a protagonist of sorts, the actors turn him into a symbol of personal empowerment.

Felix points out that Caliban has other layers as well. Like Ariel, he can sing and dance; he also has the most romantic speech in the play, in which he speaks about his love for the island. His desire for revenge seems to link him to Prospero, but while Prospero wants to leave the island, Caliban wishes to rule it and fill it with children he will have by raping Miranda. Leggs mutters that this is "not a bad plan."

It's easy to see Caliban as just a monstrous prisoner, but Shakespeare makes certain that there are other factors complicating this simplistic assessment—one of the reasons that the play has often been treated as a more complicated examination of colonialism, rather than a straightforward endorsement of the system.

Felix acknowledges the fact that most of the actors don't like Prospero, and tells them to think seriously before committing to the difficult part of Caliban. In the meantime, since one of the play's main themes is imprisonment, he tells them to go through the text and list all the **prisons**. He tells them there are seven; there are actually nine, but he wants them to outdo him. When 8Handz asks what counts as a prison, Felix defines it as "any place or situation that you've been put in against your will." Leggs ask if they'll get cigarettes for identifying the most prisons.

Although Felix is playing the tyrannical authority figure that the prisoners dislike, he doesn't actually resemble such a person in real life. In fact, with their condescending and exploitative attitudes towards the prisoners, it's the visiting politicians who will most strongly recreate the dynamic between Prospero and Caliban.

CHAPTER 20. SECOND ASSIGNMENT: PRISONERS AND JAILERS

The class's consolidated list of **prisons** is laid out in a table. Sycorax is exiled to the island by the government of Algiers, her native land. Ariel is trapped in a pine tree by Sycorax. Prospero and Miranda are jailed in a leaky boat and, later, the island by Antonio and Alonso. Prospero goes on to trap Caliban in some rocks on the island. Later, when he brings his enemies to the island with a storm, Prospero jails Ferdinand through Ariel's illusions; he also imprisons Antonio, Alonso, and Sebastian by having Ariel cast enchantments on them. Finally, Stephano and Trinculo are imprisoned in a pond by Ariel, on Prospero's orders.

Almost everyone in the play is incarcerated at some point; it's notable that the most prominent jailer is Prospero, who himself is imprisoned. This phenomenon can suggest that it's actually freedom which is illusory and unusual, while imprisonment is the norm. In Felix's modern interpretation, it can also argue that it's impossible to exile and stigmatize one group of people without affecting the freedom of the general society.

CHAPTER 21. PROSPERO'S GOBLINS

Felix congratulates the class on having spotted eight prisons. However, he tells them, there's actually a ninth they haven't identified; he'll reveal it to them after they've done the play. In the meantime, he tells them to turn their mind to the jailers. Almost everyone in the play has been jailed by Prospero, even though he himself is imprisoned. Red Coyote points out that Prospero isn't just a jailer but a "slave driver," of Caliban and Ariel. Ironically, he adds that Prospero will probably discover oil on the island, "develop it," and "machine-gun everyone to keep them off it."

Red Coyote makes a direct connection between Prospero's behavior and the ways in which colonialist regimes have shaped Canada and oppressed its indigenous people. In this sense he's demonstrating the continued relevance of Shakespeare's work, as well as its ability to be timely and prescient in ways Shakespeare himself could not have imagined.

Some of the prisoners start arguing with Red Coyote, but Felix calls for calm. Although they don't like Prospero, he asks them to consider the wizard's lack of options. He's trapped on an island trying to defend his daughter from Caliban, who's constantly trying to rape her and is physically stronger than Prospero. Grudgingly and with Felix's prompting, the prisoners agree that Prospero does have the right to defend himself, although Red Coyote maintains he should never have been on the island anyway.

Still identifying strongly with Prospero, Felix is committed to defending his actions. However, by the end of the novel he'll be much less concerned with the wizard and more receptive to the actors' embrace of Caliban.

After settling this part of the play, WonderBoy asks why Prospero inflicts such elaborate imprisonments on his enemies as well, instead of just killing them and leaving the island. Felix tries to think of a good explanation; he suggests that Prospero is not only trying to get revenge but also secure a calm political situation when he returns to his dukedom in Milan, an aim best achieved by reconciling with Alonso and forging an alliance by marrying Miranda and Ferdinand.

While Felix is speaking off the cuff here, he's also foreshadowing the decisions he will eventually make in effecting his own revenge: by eventually letting his enemies go, he secures a calm future for himself, as well as benefits for his protégé Anne-Marie.

However, Prospero doesn't want to force Miranda to get married; he wants her to fall in love, so he uses his magic to arrange the outcome he wants. Moreover, by tricking Alonso into thinking his son is dead and then reuniting them, he creates goodwill and convinces the other man to agree to the marriage, rather than insisting that his son marry someone richer or more powerful. His treatment of Ferdinand is both an act of revenge and a "calculated stratagem." The actors approve of Prospero's cunning, and agree that he's justified in his actions.

One of the play's key concerns is that Miranda's love affair with Ferdinand is both a genuine romance and a trick perpetrated by Prospero. The situation asks whether it's possible for relationships to be both sincere and contrived. While The Tempest remains ambivalent on this matter, Atwood will suggest that it's perfectly possible for positive relationships to contain such contradictions.

Next, Felix wants to talk about the "enforcers" of the play. Everyone is confused, since no such persons are listed in the cast, but Felix shows them the numerous references to "goblins" in the text, which he explains are magical creatures played by whichever actors aren't already on stage. They do the play's "dirty work," corralling characters like Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo and enabling Prospero's revenge. While he smiles at the class, he imagines Tony and Sal at the mercy of his own goblins.

The play's goblins are unnamed and largely unimportant, functioning totally at the behest of Prospero. While Felix will also direct his own goblins, the prisoners will see these roles as valuable and morally righteous—again showing how Felix puts an egalitarian spin on his portrayal of Prospero.

CHAPTER 22. THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

On Thursday, Felix has plans to meet Anne-Marie for lunch and brief her before her first meeting with the other actors, which will take place on Friday. In the morning he eats his egg alone; Miranda is somewhere else, being "cagey" like a normal teenage girl. He's given a lot of thought to the casting decisions—wondering whether to cast "by type" or against it, and weighing the actors' preferences—but he thinks he's arrived at a good line-up. When he directed professional productions, he was known for aggressive "envelope-pushing" in his casting, but now he tries to play it more safely, giving each actor the part in which he is most likely to succeed.

Felix both wants Miranda to be a "normal" teenager and feels anxious whenever anything about her personality changes; he can't acknowledge that, even in relationships between two living people, such change is normal and inevitable. His revised approach to casting his plays shows that he's shifted from a desire to shock people with aesthetic decisions to a wish to accomplish moral objectives through his work—like giving actors parts that will allow them to grow personally.

Felix looks over the notes he's made for Anne-Marie, which state the casting assignments as well as a brief biography and the criminal record of each actor. He's given Ariel to 8Handz, a bright young man incarcerated for hacking. 8Handz thinks of himself as a "benevolent Robin Hood" working against capitalism, and feels that his imprisonment is unjust.

In a way, it's 8Handz's intelligence that leads to his incarceration. This contravenes the stereotype of prisoners as inherently stupid and uneducated.

Caliban will be played by Leggs, an Irish and black veteran of the war in Afghanistan, who turned to drugs and robbery after the government wouldn't pay for his PTSD treatment. In prison, he was part of an addiction recovery program until it got canceled. He's a good actor, but a "touchy" person.

Leggs's backstory demonstrates that for many prisoners, incarceration has more to do with the oppressive social forces among which they live than their actual character or morals.

Ferdinand will be played by WonderBoy, who looks younger than he is. He's been convicted for selling fake life insurance to old people; as such, he's very charismatic and almost too effective at making people like him.

It's notable that Felix is most distrustful of WonderBoy, since—like the director himself—he excels at creating illusions.

Alonso will be played by Krampus, jailed for participating in a Mennonite drug ring. Sebastian's part goes to Phil the Pill, a middle-aged doctor jailed after prescribing opioids to college students who later overdosed. Felix describes him as easily taken advantage of. Bent Pencil, a pompous but respected accountant convicted of embezzling, will play Gonzalo.

Despite having committed crimes, these three men are all middle-aged and gentle—if anything, they bore Felix with their pomposity. With his constant plotting and disregard for the law, Felix is as much a criminal as they are—he just doesn't bear the social stigma of imprisonment.

Antonio's part goes to SnakeEye, a real-estate scammer who also ran a small Ponzi scheme. He thinks that other people are "credulous and deserve to be fleeced," and is good at playing villains.

SnakeEye is the only prisoner who somewhat fits the stereotype of the unrepentant criminal, but even he is distinguished by his intelligent and canny nature.

Stephano will be played by Red Coyote, a young Native-Canadian man in jail for bootlegging and selling drugs and who feels that "the legal system is illegitimate." His partner, Trinculo, will be played by TimEEz, a young man of Chinese background convicted as the ringleader of a shoplifting ring.

It's Red Coyote who provides much of the social commentary as the prisoners are discussing the play, and who explicitly makes the link between Caliban's oppression and the oppression of native peoples in Canada.

Felix has added an "Announcer" part, who summarizes each scene in order to allow the audience to follow. He's assigned Shiv the Mex, a gang enforcer, to this part. The Boatswain will be played by PPod, and African Canadian also in prison for gang-related offenses. Finally, there are three female goddesses—Iris, Ceres, and Juno—who appear to Prospero. Felix hasn't figured out what to do about them, since none of the men will play a woman.

Felix's addition of extra parts shows that even though he believes in Shakespeare's eternal greatness, he's willing to be flexible in implementing his plays. For him, the eternal nature of Shakespeare's plays depends on their ability to change and adapt to contemporary circumstances.

Next, Felix has notes assigning crew parts to different actors, based on their skills. For example, he's placed 8Handz, the talented hacker, in charge of tech and special effects and WonderBoy, who's good at selling things, in charge of publicity skills. The chief goblins will be Riceball, Col.Deth, and Vamoose; they are the "ultimate weapon" for his second, secret projects. He imagines that they can wear black ski masks, the better to inspire fear.

With their nonjudgmental descriptions of the prisoners' pasts and adept analysis of their characters, Felix's notes show his investment in the prisoners. At the same time, the addendum about the goblins shows that his primary concern is his own revenge—even if accomplishing it puts the prisoners at risk.

CHAPTER 23. ADMIRED MIRANDA

The same day, Felix meets Anne-Marie for lunch. Somehow she already looks younger and more open; Felix thinks she's "melding" into her role. She tells Felix she's become a vegetarian; this reminds him of Miranda, who has done the same. He orders a burger for himself, wondering what Prospero and Miranda ate on the island before remembering that Caliban unwillingly caught them fish.

It's interesting that while Anne-Marie is becoming more and more like Miranda, Felix is slowly starting to distance himself from Prospero, with whom he identified completely at the beginning of the novel.

Anne-Marie says that Miranda's part has always been in her head, waiting for the day she could use it. Felix says he's excited to perform together, but she's a little grim to think that the biggest role of her life will be performed in an amateur **prison** production. Felix promises her that the production will seem "hyper-real" once she's in it.

Felix is ironically referring to the secret play he intends to stage, but he's also suggesting the ability of theater to reflect fundamental truths and influence real life, whether it's staged in a prestigious theater or a humble prison.

Felix shows Anne-Marie his notes, and she protests that he shouldn't have told her about their crimes; she doesn't want to come into the play with preconceptions. He points out that normal actors already know all the dirty gossip that exists in the industry. Jokingly, Anne-Marie asks if Caliban will actually try to rape her, but Felix promises the other men would stop him. Since she'll be working most closely with WonderBoy, he gives her some background on his insurance schemes and warns her not to be too seduced by his charms.

Felix is very negative about WonderBoy's past, and worries about his ability to manipulate Anne-Marie—he also wants to manipulate her himself. Just as with Tony, Felix criticizes people who misrepresent themselves for their own ends while doing so himself all the time.

Anne-Marie says that Felix is already playing her "overprotective dad," but reminds him that teenage girls always desert her fathers. Moving on, he asks her if she can help out with choreography during some of the musical numbers, and she agrees. They discuss Ariel's controversial "bee-sucking" monologue, and Felix says that he might allow the actors to rewrite it. Finally, he asks if Anne-Marie has any ideas about making puppets or dolls for the goddesses. She suggests Disney princess dolls and promises to brainstorm.

With her offhand remark about teenage girls, Anne-Marie unwittingly points out everything that is false about Felix's conception of Miranda; he's not only pretending she's alive but refusing to acknowledge the distance that inevitably grows between children and their parents. In his "relationship" with his daughter, Felix is attempting to forestall change on many levels.

Feeling that he has an ally in his project, Felix is cheered and confident. Then, for a second, he doubts himself: maybe she's not laughing in camaraderie but because she thinks he's insane. He imagines the play's Miranda having the same revelation about her own father—realizing that he's talking to people who don't exist and that he can't perform all the magic he claims to know. Rather than being under the protection of a wizard, she's trapped on an island with a doddering old man and a monster who wants to rape her. Firmly, Felix reminds himself that Prospero really is powerful, and tells himself to "trust the play."

One of the reasons Felix is so fascinated by The Tempest is that it presents Prospero as sometimes omnipotent and sometimes full of human weakness. However, when he has to confront this paradox in his own life, it's very unsettling. It's notable that right now he's worried about weakness not because it might inhibit his revenge but because it might hurt his daughter—a much more sympathetic motivation.

CHAPTER 24. TO THE PRESENT BUSINESS

After making copies of his cast list, Felix collects Anne-Marie and drives to the **prison**. She's a little daunted by the grim atmosphere. Felix quips that while *The Tempest* says "thought is free," this quote occurs in a song sung by untrustworthy fools. Jokingly, Anne-Marie tells him he's a "downer."

Felix's joke shows that while he knows he's helping the prisoners with his work, he can't do much to alleviate the concrete reality of their imprisonment and the grim circumstances they'll face upon release.

Felix introduces Anne-Marie to Dylan and Madison as a well-regarded actress. Politely, they give her a security pager; however, the knitting needles in her bag set off the metal detector and she has to surrender them. Felix is surprised to think that such a tough woman enjoys such domestic pursuits.

Felix presents an illusory version of Anne-Marie to the guards and prisoners. However, over time she grows into the persona Felix imagines, becoming more confident and thinking of herself as someone with potential, rather than a failed actress.

Felix shows his new actress around his classroom wing and she immediately claims one of the rooms for choreography practice. In the classroom, the men are waiting eagerly to meet her. Today, she's dressed in a conservative cardigan and jeans; smiling distantly, she sits primly in the back of the classroom. It's clear that everyone is trying not to stare at her; Felix feels protective, and reminds himself to stay alert.

Clearly, Anne-Marie thinks carefully about the version of herself that she wants to put forward. In the sense that she's constantly acting, even in her "real" life, Anne-Marie is much like her mentor Felix.


Before announcing the cast, Felix reminds the actors that they have to accept the decisions, even if they don't like them. When he passes out the list, everyone starts arguing. Red Coyote doesn't want to play Stephano and thinks that Caliban should be First Nations, while Leggs triumphantly tells everyone to "suck it."

While Felix often presents his work in the prison as seamlessly collaborative, moments like this are a reminder that he has a lot of difficulties to overcome as a teacher.


The newly-assigned actors and their teams move into different rooms to start practicing their scenes. Anne-Marie stretches and asks uncertainly what she should start doing. To ease her into the routine of the class, Felix starts to run through their scenes together until 8Handz appears at the door, looking for something to do. Saying he needs to confer about special effects, Felix sends Anne-Marie to supervise the other rehearsals.

Even though Anne-Marie has technically been hired to play Miranda, she's already taking on a directorial role in the play as well. While she will become like a daughter to Felix, she's a daughter with much more agency and independence than his shy, meek Miranda.

Once she's gone, Felix asks 8Handz what he knows about the **prison**'s surveillance systems; he wants to "see without being seen," all over the classroom wing. 8Handz says that with some tools smuggled in, he can arrange it. Pleased, Felix says that if he succeeds, Felix can help get him early parole; after all, he has "foes in high places."

In The Tempest, Ariel earns freedom from Prospero by assisting in his revenge. Similarly, Felix promises 8Handz early parole—but unlike Prospero, he's not the one who imprisoned the young man in the first place.

CHAPTER 25. EVIL BRO ANTONIO

Now, there's only five weeks left until Tony and Sal arrive at the **prison** and Felix's plan either succeeds or fails. He can feel them growing closer in their political orbit of attending parties, giving interviews, and arranging photo ops. He still follows their activities on the Internet, and relishes the thought that they never think of him and have no idea what's going to happen to them.

Much of Felix's revenge has to do not with altering the material circumstances of his enemies, but feeling more powerful than them. Even though he hasn't actually done anything yet, he already feels that he's getting back at Tony and Sal.

But right now, the show is nowhere near ready. Some goblins have quit, and scuffles have broken out when Felix was distracted. He only has a few scenes on video, and the keyboard he ordered hasn't arrived yet. It's hard to create the music score when the prisoners can't use the internet. Meanwhile, WonderBoy has indeed tried to seduce Anne-Marie; after she rebuffs him, he performs his scenes sulkily.

WonderBoy's long sulk is a comic demonstration of the extent to which, just as theater can influence the real world, offstage events have much to do with the way a production shapes up.

Almost everyone is flubbing their lines; in his old life Felix would berate his actors for these kinds of mistakes, but he knows he can't behave so erratically with these vulnerable men. Instead, he reminds them that they have talent and can produce better work. While he does this, he worries about the play's missing energy.

Even though Felix views the prisoners' "vulnerability" as a limitation on what he can accomplish right now, it's actually making him into a less volatile and more sensitive director.

During the morning coffee break, SnakeEye and Anne-Marie approach him to say that the Antonio team has composed a rap to tell the play's backstory, which he wants to use instead of a speech by Prospero widely considered long and boring. Ruefully, Felix thinks that SnakeEye is cutting him out of the play, just as Antonio does to Prospero. Still, he agrees to hear the number.

It's interesting that even offstage, the prisoners start to take on the roles they've been assigned within the play. The one person who completely transcends her role is Anne-Marie, who takes charge of the play, while Miranda is largely passive within it.


The team gets into a formation and, on Anne-Marie's signal, launches into an aggressive and rhythmic dance. Felix is impressed. SnakeEye begins the rap, which tells the story of Prospero's exile from the point of view of "Evil Bro Antonio." According to Antonio, Prospero was "a fool" who didn't "watch his back," thus allowing Antonio to claim the kingdom for himself.

Clearly, SnakeEye identifies with the play's villain and rationalizes Antonio's behavior—just as Felix wants to use the production to punish Tony, his real-life Antonio. At the same time, SnakeEye is expressing his feelings through poetry, a departure from his swaggering persona and thus a moment of personal growth.


After finishing the rap, everyone looks hopefully at Felix. The routine is excellent—in fact, it's so much better than Prospero's speech that Felix wants to "throttle" SnakeEye. Anne-Marie says warmly that the scene is a "keeper" and, in a whisper, accuses Felix of being jealous; she has an uncanny ability to know what he's thinking.

Just as he resents Tony's success, Felix envies SnakeEye's fresh performance; however, he's more willing to be overshadowed by the prisoner, which reflects both the growing generosity of his own character and the fact that SnakeEye's work is positive and collaborative, while Tony's machinations are totally self-centered.


SnakeEye suggests that, after his rap, Prospero perform the end of his speech, in which he describes how his love for Miranda preserved him through his darkest days—a particularly resonant passage for Felix. Many of the prisoners have children, and SnakeEye wants to superimpose their pictures onto the sky during this part of the speech; 8Handz can make them flash on the screen like starts. Shyly, SnakeEye asks if Felix wants to include any pictures of his own in the montage. Felix thinks of his treasured photo of Miranda, but sharply retorts that he has nothing to add. Stumbling into one of the small classrooms, he collapses on a bunk, head in his hands.

Even though Felix has become so invested in the prisoners, he balks at sharing anything personal with them—even as their separation from beloved children reflects the extent to which he and they face similar challenges. While Felix's detached and scholarly persona usually helps him grow into a better man, here it prevents him from forging a deeper connection with his students or acknowledging his grief in a productive way.

CHAPTER 26. QUAINT DEVICES

To cheer himself up, Felix goes to Toronto over the weekend to buy props. First, he stops at a toy store; places like this no longer cause him pain now that Miranda is too old to play with toys. When he asks the saleswoman for boat-shaped toys, she assumes he's a grandfather, and he doesn't correct her. He also asks her to help him find Snow White, Jasmine, and Pocahontas dolls. The woman compliments him on his knowledge of girls' tastes, saying he must have experience with daughters.

While Felix congratulates himself on the fact that toy stores no longer trigger sadness, he hasn't actually overcome his grief—rather, he's continuing to evade it by imagining Miranda as grown-up.

Next, Felix goes to a **costume** store and buys blue wings, makeup and face paint in various colors, a Godzilla hat, glittery fabric, confetti, and temporary tattoos. In the end, he has to buy a suitcase to carry all his purchases. In a sporting goods store, he buys skiing goggles and fifteen black ski masks, and nearby he finds a raincoat patterned in bugs and butterflies. At Staples, he buys construction paper, markers, and cardboard to create the island sets.

Like Felix's animal skin cape, when described in the most factual manner the costume materials sound silly and even tacky. However, employed on the stage they manage not only to cast deceptive and realistic illusions but also allow the prisoners to express the hidden recesses of their characters.

Finally, Felix stops at a woman's swimwear store to buy a blue swim cap. When the saleswoman asks if he's shopping for his wife, he's tempted to say it's actually for a young criminal, but instead he assents and tells her they're going on a cruise. The cap he ends up with is slightly small, and he hopes it will stretch enough to fit 8Handz.

Lying to the many sales clerks is convenient, but it also allows Felix to step into another life, one in which he hasn't lost his wife and daughter. For once, the actual absence of this life doesn't trigger despair—between the play and his revenge, he has a sense of purpose and much to think about.

CHAPTER 27. IGNORANT OF WHAT THOU ART

When Felix returns to his cottage, the sun is setting beautifully and snow flurries are falling. A few years ago, Miranda would have been frolicking outside in weather like this, but now he can't see any sign of her. However, when he goes outside and calls her name, she's in the corner, waiting for him. He shows her all his purchases and she pores over them wonderingly, asking what each thing is; she has almost no knowledge about the outside world. Felix tells her that he's putting on a play and then has to explain what a play is. She listens "attentively."

Felix imagines that Miranda is too old to play with toys, but she still lacks even the most basic knowledge about the outside world. Felix isn't reincarnating a realistic version of his daughter; he's creating a pastiche of characteristics best suited to soothe his grief. In this sense, he's constraining his daughter's memory, rather than preserving it.

During Felix's next session at the **prison**, Miranda reads the entire *Tempest*. Felix has never wanted her—a vulnerable and sensitive girl—to go into a harsh industry like theater, but she's fascinated by the play and wants to play Miranda in his production. When he tells her this is impossible, she gets mad for the first time in her life. To Felix's dismay, she disappears from the cabin, leaving him with no idea where she is.

For the first time, Felix and Miranda have an interaction that actually resembles a real parent-child relationship. Paradoxically, while this scene makes their relationship seem more "real," Miranda's disappearance reminds Felix that she is in fact imaginary.

CHAPTER 28. HAG-SEED

With **costumes** and sets making the play feel more real, everyone is more enthusiastic. The keyboard finally arrives, and Anne-Marie works on choreography and music in one of the classrooms. 8Handz is busy with the cables and cameras that Felix has procured for him. Felix sets up a folding screen in the main room, behind which is a computer showing video feeds from all the other rooms in Felix's classroom block. Felix commends 8Handz on his ingenious work and promises that he's cleared all this with the authorities, a statement he considers "half true."

Even though the costumes seem silly and superficial, they help the prisoners to effect real transformations in their acting. 8Handz's technical set-up allows Felix to see and control everything that happens in his classroom wing; however, it also shows the extent to which that power derives from illusions and outside help, rather than Felix's own abilities.

WonderBoy and Anne-Marie have developed a better working relationship, although he continues to follow her around offstage. To counter this she's adopted a maternal air, baking cookies for all the prisoners and the guards. Felix is astonished that someone so young can appear so commanding and "matronly." She's also taken charge of the goddess dolls, telling him that her knitting group will create outfits for them. Felix teases her for her grandmotherly hobby, but she says that it keeps her calm.

Anne-Marie is a mix of contradictions: she's young and beautiful at the same time as cultivating matronly hobbies, and she's tough but considerate at the same time. Perhaps Felix's perplexity stems from the fact that his protégé is so much more nuanced than the imaginary daughter he's created for his companion.

Felix is worried that knitted attire for the goddesses is "bad taste…[and] not the kind of bad taste he favored." He reminds Anne-Marie that his most important speech, in which he describes the island fading away like the play itself, comes after the appearance of the goddesses. When he declaims part of the speech, Anne-Marie is very moved. His effortless talent, she says, is the reason she always wanted to work with him. She reassures him that the dolls will look fantastic once she's done with them.

It's interesting that the most important speech—for both Prospero and Felix—concerns the demise of the island and the play, the two things that give them power and security. While the play allows Felix to consolidate his advantages and achieve revenge, it also points to the inevitable decline of his power.

It's Wednesday, and there are two weeks left of rehearsal. They've recorded some of the first scenes on video, and today are shooting Caliban's scenes. In full costume, Leggs tells Felix that his team has written an extra number for Caliban, choreographed by Anne-Marie. Worried about wasting time, Felix grumpily agrees to see it.

As the prisoners revise many aspects of the play, it's important that they are most interested in rewriting Caliban's role. Identifying with the enslaved villain highlights their conception of themselves as marginalized, but changing his plotline shows their ability to empower themselves.

Caliban's team—TimEEz, PPod, VaMoose, and Red Coyote—clap a beat while Leggs begins to rap. Prospero, he says, "**prison** me up to make me behave," but he can't be contained because he's "Hag-Seed." He tells the story of his birth to Sycorax, a "real bad bitch" after she was dumped on the island. He says that he was kind to Prospero upon his first arrival, but after he tried to "jump" Miranda the wizard "pinch me black and pinch me blue," making him do all the work on the island. The rap ends with Caliban's avowal that if he ever gets the chance he'll kill Prospero and rape Miranda, making her "my Hag-Seed queen."

By rapping about Prospero's imprisonment of Caliban, Leggs makes even more explicit the connection between the prisoners and the play's villain; he also points out the differences between Prospero and Felix, who helps the prisoners empower themselves and fight the stigma of imprisonment. The one problematic aspect of the prisoners' embrace of Caliban is the gleeful violence it entails, especially towards Miranda.


Anne-Marie claps enthusiastically at the end of the rap, and after a minute Felix does as well. He's a little choked-up at Leggs's performance; he knows that it's only Anne-Marie, not him, who could coax out this excellence. Quoting the play, he says that it's a "brave new world." When Anne-Marie asks if they're trifling with the play too much, he reassures her that the play belongs to all of them, not just him.

Felix has finally learned how to take pride in the plays he directs without feeling that all their merits are due to him. By working at the prison, he's arrived at a much more inclusive and less self-centered conception of his own profession.


CHAPTER 29. APPROACH

Felix wakes up on Saturday feeling hungover from all the energy he's expended on the play. He walks sleepily into the bright living room, wondering where Miranda is. She rarely appears in the morning when the sun is so high. He castigates himself for thinking so much about her, telling herself he's maintaining "just enough illusion to keep [himself] alive." He should give up his "tinsel stickers" and "paper cutouts" and face the grim reality of his actual life. But, he argues with himself, real life comprises even the things "we can't see."

It's interesting that Felix compares his imaginings to "tinsel" and "paper"; he's likening them to a costume, or the materials the prisoners use to decorate their set. Especially given the connotations of costumes in the play, this metaphor aptly captures the mingled truthfulness and unreality in Miranda's appearances to him.


Felix shakes himself out of this reverie and makes himself some coffee and cereal. He barely has any food left in the cupboard; if he goes on like this much longer, he might become one of those people who die of starvation because they forget to eat.

While Miranda's presence helps Felix remember to eat, his dependence on her keeps him trapped in loneliness, worrying about dying in solitude.

On his computer, Felix searches for Tony and Sal. There's another politician in their pack now, Sebert Stanley. In just a short time they'll all be within Felix's reach. He wonders if they'll recognize him, and how they'll behave when he realizes he controls their fates.

Felix never mentions or seems to think about the "fates" he'll assign his enemies—just to be in control of their futures for a brief moment is revenge enough for him.

Next, Felix looks over his calendar. This week they're filming his scenes, and since there's only time for one take, he'll have to be on point. For the first time, he tries on his **magic cape**. Doing so is like "stepping back into a shed skin"; he immediately feels powerful and confident. However, when he calls aloud for Ariel to come to him, his voice "sounds fraudulent." Suddenly, he doubts his ability to play Prospero: no one could possibly communicate all the aspects of his character.

Felix doubts his ability to live up to Prospero, but he himself is proving as nuanced—and probably far better intentioned—than his inspiration. In fact, the ways in which he diverges from his character aren't a limitation but a strength.

Telling himself not to give up, Felix tries the line again; this time he hears Miranda's voice in his ear, continuing with Ariel's speech. Startled, Felix drops the **staff** he's been holding. He realizes that Miranda has decided to understudy Ariel, and he's amazed by her cleverness in finding a part that will allow her to blend into the production. The only one to know she's there will be him. He wants to hug her, but it's impossible—no one can touch a spirit like Ariel.

Felix's daughter obviously corresponds to The Tempest's Miranda in name, but as an unearthly, invisible spirit she takes on Ariel's characteristics as well. Moreover, in that Felix conjures up Miranda and sometimes appears to control her, he seems to reenact Prospero's somewhat tyrannical relationship with Ariel as well.


CHAPTER 30. SOME VANITY OF MINE ART

Felix wakes up suddenly in the morning, haunted by a dream he can't remember. He thinks that he should have listed dreams as one of the main themes of *The Tempest*; characters are always falling asleep or comparing the fantastic events of the plot to dreams. He wonders if Shakespeare knew what he was doing when he wrote, or if he was "sleepwalking part of the time." Felix tells himself not to come up with new ideas at this late date.

It's interesting that dreams are so important in The Tempest—like the theatrical illusions that Felix creates, they are both obviously false and sometimes very influential in the real world. In fact, the prevalence of dreams may be one of the play's ways of interrogating the interactions between theater and the real world.

Today the cast will be shooting Felix's first scene with Ariel, so he packs the **magic garment** into a bag after he gets dressed. Anne-Marie has presented him with a hat, in order to keep his head warm, and which he now wears to class. When he questioned her about WonderBoy recently, she admitted that he wants to write her letters after the play is over. Felix vigorously advises against this, but she tells him to stay out of it; they haven't shot her love scenes yet, and if she lets WonderBoy down now he won't perform well. Felix laughs that she's "ruthless," but she counters that she learned everything from him.

Anne-Marie's considerate gift shows that she's started to develop filial feelings for Felix offstage as well as in the theater. Like the imaginary Miranda, she takes care of him, but unlike Miranda she can help Felix start a positive new life in the real world. Moreover, it's clear from her manipulation of WonderBoy that she's inheriting Felix's single-minded, sometimes unscrupulous fixation on the success of his plays.

In fact, the scene turns out perfectly. Anne-Marie makes a white **costume** for herself and projects "rapt enchantment," while WonderBoy is "the embodiment of yearning desire." Felix hopes that the actor won't be too distraught to lose Anne-Marie, but he reminds himself that as "a con man playing an actor," the young man is "a double unreality."

Felix feels that WonderBoy is inherently untrustworthy, but he himself puts forth layers and layers of illusions. Even to people who know his true identity, like Anne-Marie and Estelle, he's constantly dissembling his real goals and motivations.

When Felix surveys himself in the mirror now, he realizes he's looking gaunt. For the first time Miranda comes with him to the car, although she's initially hesitant to get in. He hopes she doesn't remember her last car ride, on the way to the hospital with a high fever. Why hadn't he noticed her symptoms earlier? He can't even remember the production that had distracted his attention at the time.

By keeping Miranda in the cottage, Felix has been able to enjoy her presence without reckoning with the circumstances of her death. Taking a first step into the real world, she both develops like a "real" girl and conjures up the specter of her demise.

Soothingly, Felix tells Miranda that the car is a magic machine that will take them anywhere they need to go. She seems to like the ride, and she's astonished at all the ordinary things they see along the way. He reassures her that the **prison** guards won't be able to see her; indeed, she doesn't even make a noise going through the metal detector. Offhandedly, he tells Dylan and Madison that he'll be stopping by the next day to deliver some equipment.

Even though Miranda's ability to pass through the prison "undetected" seems to emphasize her unreality, it actually makes Felix more convinced of her presence and full of new purpose in his work.

The class is already assembled. Anne-Marie has brought the goddesses in their new outfits: a rainbow gown for Iris, a garment of plants for Ceres, and a nurse uniform with fangs for Juno. The cast likes everyone except Juno, who Shiv says "looks like my wife." Felix dismisses everyone to rehearse while they shoot his scenes.

It's interesting that no one takes the goddesses seriously except for Anne-Marie. Neither the prisoners nor Felix devote much thought to the possibility of the play's women to empower themselves; it's up to Anne-Marie to keep them from slipping into stereotypes of passivity and vulnerability.

8Handz is already in **costume**; although he knows his lines perfectly, he is still nervous. He asks Felix if they can do a second take; he's been hearing feedback in his microphone, as if someone else is saying the lines along with him. Trying to seem calm, Felix asks if the voice is male or female, but 8Handz dismissively says it's probably just his own. Quietly, Felix reminds Miranda not to speak so loudly.

Miranda's "presence" in 8Handz's earphones strengthens her alignment with Ariel and makes her seem more real—possibly not just living in Felix's head. Just as he hoped all those years ago, staging The Tempest really does help Felix feel closer to his deceased daughter.

CHAPTER 31. BOUNTIFUL FORTUNE, NOW MY DEAR LADY

Almost everything is ready: the cast has created the sets, sung their songs, and fought amongst themselves throughout it all. Felix alternately castigates himself for taking on this project and "congratulates himself on his judgment." The goddesses look fantastic on the video, especially with the creepy background music PPod composes and the special effects added by 8Handz.

This passage juxtaposes the wholesome work of putting the play together and Felix's nefarious scheme, which underpins the endeavor.


Felix makes another trip to Toronto, where he buys bowler hats and white makeup for Stephano and Trinculo. After that, he meets a middle-aged Korean man in the train station; a contact of 8Handz, the man gives Felix a package of pills, some powder, and a hypodermic needle. He tells Felix precisely how much of each substance to use in order to induce strong but not permanently damaging effects. Felix feels more reckless than ever before in his life.

Although the reader still doesn't know exactly what Felix is planning, he must have shared his ideas with 8Handz. In a way, Felix is staging a play not only within the prison but in his narration—he controls the information that flows to the reader in order to create suspense and increase the sense of his own power.

The next day, Felix eats eggs for breakfast and checks on Tony and Sal, who are attending one function after another, making campaign promises and collecting donations. When he checks his email, he finds a message from Estelle, saying she needs to see him as soon as possible. He accepts her invitation to lunch. He always behaves graciously to Estelle, who "gets a huge kick out of being an unseen but crucial part" of the productions.

Estelle is an invisible aid to Felix's work, just as Ariel helps Prospero without being seen by the other characters. However, the director and supervisor have a much more egalitarian relationship than Prospero and his enslaved spirit.


When they meet at their usual lunch place, Felix suspects that Estelle has dressed up for him more than usual. Felix orders a martini, as they've taken to having drinks with their lunch. Estelle confides to him that she's heard Tony and Sal are going to cancel the **prison** literacy program after seeing the play. They've labeled it a "reward for criminality" and project of the "liberal elites."

Tony and Sal treat prisoners as less than human; for them, incarceration isn't just a period of punishment but a lifelong loss of rights and respect. While Felix stresses the possibility of theater to bring about personal growth, the politicians deny that such transformations can occur at all.

Estelle is puzzled that Felix doesn't seem more disappointed. He's actually thrilled, because this new slight is exactly what he needs to win the actors to his cause. He tells Estelle that he has an idea to save the program, but she'll have to help him; she responds that she'll do anything she can.

Even though this is a blow for the prisoners, Felix is happy because it facilitates his revenge. Moments like this show that he continues to be somewhat self-absorbed even though he's grown so much since the start of the novel.


Felix asks who else will be accompanying the ministers, and Estelle pulls out a file folder full of information she's not technically supposed to have. Scanning the page, Felix finds that Lonnie Gordon—now a local political fundraiser—will be attending, as well as Sebert Stanley, who's planning to run for party leader against Sal. Estelle says that the race is a toss-up, since Sebert is considered ineffective by the rest of the party but Sal has made lots of enemies. No one knows whom Tony is backing.

Corresponding to Gonzalo and Sebastian, Lonnie and Sebert fill out the cast of characters as defined by The Tempest, making it easier for Felix to create a series of events that mirrors the play's plot. Even their relationships are similar: Antonio is torn between supporting Alonso or Sebastian, and Tony's loyalties are similarly unclear.

Last on the list is Sal's son Frederick, an aspiring actor who has been unsuccessful so far. Felix immediately dismisses him, assuming that his father pulled strings to get him into university theater programs. However, when Estelle admits that she's shown Frederick videos of Felix's **prison** productions and he thinks they're genius, his opinion softens slightly.

Felix's rapid change of opinion towards Frederick—and his eventual embrace of the young man—show how susceptible he still is to flattery, even as he also uses it to manipulate other people, like Estelle. Even though he's a master at creating illusions, he still falls for them himself.

Felix asks anxiously if any of the men know his real identity, but Estelle reassures him smilingly that she's taken trouble to keep his cover by telling everyone he's a "broken-down failure of an old teacher." Elated, Felix orders another martini; somehow, he finds himself holding hands with Estelle, whom he calls "the best Lady Luck I could ever have." Estelle clinks her glass with him; she doesn't know what he's planning, but if it will save the Players, she's ready to help.

Just like Ariel does for Prospero, Estelle preserves Felix's power by hiding his identity. Her immediate willingness to get involved with his devious schemes is rather unrealistic, but it paves the way for them to deepen their relationship—one of the novel's notable departures from the plot of The Tempest.

CHAPTER 32. FELIX ADDRESSES THE GOBLINS

It's the day of the performance, but first Felix has to give a "pre-battle speech." He adjusts his **magic garment** and walks down the hallway, peeking inside the classroom where a bowl of grapes, each injected with the hypodermic needle, is waiting. In full costume, the cast waits for him in the classroom. 8Handz stands by the screen that hides all the technical equipment. The tense atmosphere is familiar from all the premieres that Felix has been a part of.

Rallying his troops, Felix emphasizes how similar this play is to professional productions he's staged. At the same time, because of its real-life implications this one is fundamentally unique.

Encouragingly, Felix tells the actors that they're ready for anything. His reminder that these politicians want to destroy the theater program is greeted with boos. Felix reiterates that "they think you're a waste of time," that "they want you to stay ignorant," and that they think Shakespeare is irrelevant. However, if everything goes according to plan, they can avert the cancellation and put everything to rights. They're going to show everyone that "theater is a powerful educational tool."

Throughout the course, the play has been a vehicle of empowerment to the prisoners; now, it gives them a chance to demonstrate that empowerment to the people who intend to exploit them for political gain. In this sense theater is "powerful" both by facilitating personal growth and by upsetting entrenched power dynamics.

Next, Felix goes over the instructions one last time. The sailors will escort the politicians into the room and serve refreshments. Sal and Lonnie must drink from blue cups, while Tony and Sebert will get green ones. Everyone else has clear cups. When the screen goes dark, everyone needs to insert their ear buds and put on their masks while TimEEz removes all the security alarms. If there's any trouble, the alert is "scurvy monster."

Again, it's clear that Felix and the players know much more about what's going to happen than the reader does. By withholding information, the narrative essentially imprisons the reader, who experiences the ensuing events in ignorance—much as the unwitting politicians do.


Anxiously, Bent Pencil says he hopes no one will get hurt, but Felix reassures him everything will be fine, as long as they don't fight. He reminds the goblins not to use too much force, and sends everyone to their places: the dressing room is now Prospero's cave, while one of the demonstration cells is decorated as Ferdinand's **prison**, where Anne-Marie will "babysit" Frederick O'Nally. The actress wonders aloud if their treatment of the young man—who hasn't done anything to hurt them—is ethical, but Felix brushes these concerns aside, reminding her that it's his father who "crapped up your career."

Felix tries to cast himself as a generous benefactor selflessly enabling those around him—from the prisoners to Anne-Marie—to achieve personal vengeance. In refusing to come clean about his own aims in this project, he's continuing to project an illusory version of himself to the prisoners.

The other demonstration cell will be the "nap-time location" for Sal and Lonnie. Felix reminds the goblins how important it is that everyone is placed in the right room, and reassures them that security won't know what's going on. Admiringly, Leggs tells Felix that he's a genius, but he modestly says that it's Ariel, or 8Handz, who has facilitated everything. Wishing each other "merde" (the French word for "shit") instead of luck, the cast bumps fists before the show begins.

Even though Felix is still somewhat self-centered in the importance he places on his own revenge, he's become very fair in distributing credit for the play's success, showing his ability to transform even as he's fulfilling the goal that has consumed him since the beginning of the novel.

CHAPTER 33. THE HOUR'S NOW COME

The politicians pose for a picture outside the prison. They can all imagine the caption that will accompany its publication in the newspapers. Sal has gained weight with the years, but Tony is still "ultra-tailored." Sebert looks like a seal, but Frederick is handsome and looks scornfully away from the camera. Accompanying them is a group of flunkies. Estelle stands with them; it's her job to monitor the people watching the play with the Warden and soothe any anxieties that might arise.

The politicians' insistence on turning the event into a photo-op shows that they have no serious interest in the prisoners; rather, they're trying to craft sympathetic images of themselves without performing any real public service. They're staging a play as well, but while Felix's claims to be morally correct, theirs functions entirely for their own profit.


Felix sits down behind the folding screen. Over the sailors' audio feeds, he can hear Sal and Tony passing through security, joking with the guards. They've come from another function and have already had a few drinks; for them, this is just a pit stop at a "holding pen for bottom-feeding social misfits" before they can get back to more important things.

The politicians see imprisonment as evidence of a social class that can never be altered. Although Felix has often been suspicious of transformations that occur in his own life, opposing this worldview teaches him to accept and embrace change.


Sal O'Nally is feeling complacent. He's agreed to see this play at the insistence of his adored Frederick, even though he plans to cancel the literacy program as soon as he returns to Ottawa—prisons are for keeping people locked up, not "spurious attempts to educate those who cannot, by their very natures, be educated." Soon, Sal will also have to break it to Frederick that he must go to law school or else lose his monthly allowance. The arts are "a dead end," especially once Tony becomes the Minister in charge of them. When a guard insists that Sal forfeit his cellphone, he blusteringly reminds him of his position, but Frederick gives a disapproving look so he complies.

It's interesting that Sal appears so skeptical of the possibility of genuine personal transformation. Felix's desire for revenge is largely fueled by his desire for things to stay the same, but when Sal extrapolates on this line of thought, he appears self-righteous and bigoted. Through their thought processes, the politicians not only establish themselves as self-serving but point out the flaws in Felix's worldview.

Tony is thinking more strategically. Both of his companions want his support in the upcoming leadership race. Certainly, Tony owes Sal for all the help he's given him, starting the day they ousted Felix Phillips; but he thinks it's now better to ally himself with a candidate who owes him instead. He wonders how he can disentangle himself from Sal and forge an alliance with Sebert. He "affably" and cheerfully walks through the metal detector with his hands up, while Lonnie proceeds dolefully and Frederick looks "wide-eyed" at all these new surroundings.

Already, Tony is situated just like his namesake in The Tempest, Antonio, who is torn between loyalty to Sal and Sebastian. While Felix will pride himself on being able to illicit certain reactions from the politicians by creating illusions, it's also evident that the play's outcome depends on their preexisting relationships with each other.

Once inside the **prison**, the politicians are greeted by a group of men dressed as pirates who welcome them to "the good ship *Tempest*." The Boatswain exhorts them not to be alarmed by anything that might occur; after all, they're about to experience a piece of experimental theater. Estelle, whom Sal knows from committees and parties, waves them off with a smile.

In one sense, the Boatswain is lying—they're about to experience Felix's revenge. However, it's also true that the players never depart from their scripted actions. This dichotomy shows the extent to which performative theater can bleed into what is considered "real life."

Awkwardly, the other men follow Sal down the hall. The sailors bring up the rear, tossing confetti in front of them; Sal thinks that "these men are having way too much fun" to be prisoners. The Boatswain guides them to the screening room, where there's a large screen and several sailors in black handing around soft drinks in blue and green cups. Watching from his hiding place, Felix sees TimEEz settle into a chair behind the men, ready to lift their security pagers. Sal takes a long sip of ginger ale, wishing it was spiked.

Again, Sal's comment displays his ignorant and ungenerous attitude towards incarcerated people. Unlike him, Felix knows that being in prison shouldn't mean the erasure of one's moral worth; he also understands that the prisoners can't healthily reenter society if they're left to rot behind bars as Sal would prefer.

In the third row, Frederick finds himself seated beside Anne-Marie and introduces himself. When she gives her name, he recognizes her from some of the dance work she's done; in fact, he's watched her videos many times as inspiration for the work he wants to do as director. Anne-Marie expresses admiration for his chosen career path and raises her glass in a toast. His gaze strays to her bare shoulder.

Anne-Marie's manipulations—she flatters Frederick by referring to him as a "director" when he's just a struggling artist—contrast with his unfeigned admiration of her. For these two, the theater has already begun.

Behind the folding screen, Felix bangs the floor with his cane. 8Handz stands with his hand over the Play button, but Felix looks around for Miranda. Suddenly he sees her, shimmering behind 8Handz's shoulder. She tells him that "the hour's now come."

In that Miranda is now appearing to him in the presence of others and actively taking part in his life, Felix's Tempest *does seem to fulfill his original goal—to revive his lost daughter.*

CHAPTER 34. TEMPEST

Formatted as a script, this chapter repeats the action of the prologue verbatim, from the initial tempest onscreen to the Announcer's brief rap to the power cut. Again, the audience voices panic and confusion before three shots are heard outside. A voice inside the room commands everyone to "keep your heads down" and "stay right where you are."

Just as in the Prologue, it's unclear to the audience which developments are part of the play and which are frighteningly real. Although the reader has a better idea of what's happening now, this is still a moment of suspense—showing that, even if one understands the illusions behind a piece of theater, one can still be taken in.

CHAPTER 35. RICH AND STRANGE

Frederick finds a hood descending over his head and a voice telling him that "you're going overboard." He hears Tony calmly telling everyone that a **prison** riot is occurring, and they all need to stay calm. His father is shouting at the prisoners to release his son, but the door opens and closes, and Frederick is gone. Another voice demands that Sal get up and follow him away. Tony vows that the prisoners will pay for their actions. In the background, the noise of waves and wind rises.

Frederick's separation from his father and Sal's fear for his life are the only sympathetic aspects of the politicians' plights. Their bond, which somewhat redeems Sal's flawed character, contrasts starkly with Tony's lack of concern for the people around him—he's already thinking about revenge.

Frederick stumbles down the hall, telling his captors that they're "making a mistake"; after all, his father is a Minister. The voices respond scornfully, telling him that Sal is "a dead duck by now." He's pushed inside a new room; when he pulls off the hood, he finds he's in a prison cell decorated with cardboard palm trees and plastic Legos. Over the speakers an eerie speech begins, which Frederick recognizes as Ariel's song in *The Tempest*, telling Ferdinand that his father is dead. This seems like a strange riot to him.

Even though Frederick frowned when his father tried to pull rank during the security inspection, in a moment of crisis he too falls back upon his privilege, but to no avail. Frederick is a character torn between the different aspects of his identity—by now, however, Felix understands that such contradictions within human character aren't necessarily duplicitous, but simply the result of natural complexity.

When the music fades, Anne-Marie enters the room. She tells him to be quiet, since the room is bugged; he has to do what she says in order to survive. Someone in the prison is crazy, she says, and is trying to re-enact *The Tempest*. She hands Frederick a script and orders him to start doing Ferdinand's speeches. When he asks her angrily if she's part of the prank, she says soothingly that she's just trying to help him.

It's hard for Frederick and even the reader to tell what's real and what's fake here—Anne-Marie obviously knows more than she's saying and is manipulating Frederick for Felix's benefit, but she's already behaving kindly, which suggests she's more sympathetic towards him than she would admit.

Frederick reads out one of the speeches, in which Ferdinand first beholds Miranda; Anne-Marie tells him to give it more feeling, as if he's really in love. He responds that he might actually be falling in love—with her. When he asks if she has a boyfriend, she giggles but tells him she doesn't. He tries to take her in his arms, but she whispers that they need to return to their lines. This time, she takes Miranda's part.

It's unclear if Anne-Marie is "pretending" to be Miranda, easily swayed into love, or if she's really affected by Frederick's earnest declaration. This part of Felix's rogue play epitomizes the difficulty in discerning between performative and unfeigned interactions.


CHAPTER 36. A MAZE TROD

Unsure of what's happening to them, Sal, Tony, Sebert, and Lonnie are marched down a pitch-black hallway, surrounding the by the amplified sounds of wind and waves. Eventually they're shoved into a cell, in which the lights go on after the door is closed. No one knows what to do. Shakily, Lonnie says they should be thankful to be alive, but Sal is moaning that they've shot his son; he says that the prisoners are "animals" who "should all be fucking dead." Calmly, Tony points out that this is the reason literacy programs should be canceled. Sal begins to sob.

While Sal's comments are harsh and reflect a deeply harmful ideology, his words are somewhat mitigated by his concern for Frederick; on the other hand, Tony is clearly only motivated by political gain, even in the midst of this ostensible crisis. One of the results of Felix's play is that it separates the merely weak—Sal – from the truly villainous—Tony.


Sebert and Tony begin to talk quietly, pointing out that the whole thing is an embarrassment. As Lonnie embarks on a long speech about the ways he would reform **prisons**, Tony makes fun of his goodhearted daydreaming. Strangely, Lonnie and Sal soon feel drowsy, stretch out on the bunks in the cell, and fall asleep.

Even though Felix likes to think of Lonnie as fundamentally different from him through his pompous behavior and lack of influence, they share similarly humane ideals.

Tony and Sebert take the opportunity to confer about Sebert's chances in the upcoming elections. Tony assures him that he's supporting him; he even points out that "when someone gets in my way…I just remove them." Sebert says that there's no way to get rid of Sal; he's a respected man with no scandals. Slyly, Tony says that they're currently in the middle of a **prison** riot; anything could happen during this chaos, and at the end of the day the prisoners will be blamed.

It's amazing that Tony can turn any situation to his advantage and someone else's loss. However, in a way this characteristic likens him to Felix—it's his rival who has used his humble position as a prison teacher to bring his powerful enemies to heel. In fighting Tony's duplicity, Felix has to confront his own deviousness.

Spelling out his plan for the benefit of the exceedingly dull Sebert, Tony proposes a hypothetical situation in which they drown Sal in a toilet and frame the prisoners; meanwhile, Lonnie would have a heart attack, assisted by a pillow. No one would be able to contest their narrative.

Almost every character, no matter how flawed, has some redeeming traits—it's only Tony who emerges as irredeemably villainous, and thus completely deserving of Felix's punishment.

Listening from the other room, Felix eagerly asks 8Handz if he has everything on tape. Tony must have been planning to oust Sal for a long time, if this drastic plan occurred to him so quickly. He tells 8Handz to sound the wake-up call before a murder actually does occur. 8Handz presses a button and Metallica begins to blare in the cell.

Since the reader has been immersed in the politicians' point of view for some time, the rapid shift to Felix's perspective is a sharp reminder that, although they don't know it, they're actually putting on a scripted performance, which Felix will use to his own ends.


Sal and Lonnie sit up suddenly. Tony says that he's been hearing roaring noises, and tells them to stand up and get ready for rioters. Sal says that he feels hungover, and Lonnie hears a buzzing in his ears.

The performance is almost exclusively on 8Handz, who has supplied the drugs and controls the special effects. His agency shows the limits of Felix's power, even as he is the plot's mastermind.

CHAPTER 37. CHARMS CRACK NOT

The cell door opens, and the lights turn on. The men don't know if it's safe to go outside. From his post, 8Handz cues up a Leonard Cohen song from the speakers in the classroom, and the men venture down the hallway towards the music. Felix says that he feels a little guilty for subjecting Lonnie to this ordeal, but he double checks with 8Handz that a speaker has been planted on the old man's collar. They watch on the video feed as the men enter the classroom, which looks like a theater's green room, complete with a bowl of grapes. Everyone starts to eat them, but a tiny voice in Lonnie's ear instructs him to stay away. Startled and confused, he stands back.

Felix's admission of guilt is a sign that he's not as consumed with revenge as he sometimes appears to be, and that he can discern who is deserving of punishment and who is merely an accessory, like Lonnie. While his behavior towards his enemies sometimes likens him to Tony, his careful attention to the fates of other people involved differentiate him from his nemesis and show how he has developed into a far more outward-looking man than he once was.

Felix asks 8Handz what exactly is in the grapes, and the young man lists off a cocktail of drugs. Soon, he says, the men will be "buzzed out of their minds." He hits a button to cue a blackout, and thunder roars in the classroom; when the lights come on, the grapes have vanished and a huge bird is waving its wings by the wall. A sing-song voice begins to intone a speech, admonishing the politicians for being "men of sin" and telling them they must "repent and say you're sorry / if you want a good end to this story."

While the gist of this monologue comes from The Tempest, the prisoners have updated it to have a more modern and immediate voice. Moments like this show how directorial flexibility can help Shakespearean plays stay true to original principles while also providing gripping experiences for modern audiences.

Sal begins to weep for Frederick again, and even Tony is disconcerted. Sebert starts shouting that they've been poisoned. Lonnie, who feels nothing strange, is confused. Watching on the screen, 8Handz cheers but Felix tells him to leave the men to the trip and check on Frederick and Anne-Marie. The two have been busy making a log pile out of the Legos in the cell and reciting speeches from *The Tempest* to each other. He muses that it almost seems like it means what they're saying.

The Legos are a reference to Ferdinand's role in The Tempest—Ariel orders him to make piles of logs in order to keep him busy while Prospero works revenge on his father. Even though it's obvious to Frederick that he's acting out a scripted role, he still develops genuine feelings for Anne-Marie as he's doing so.

CHAPTER 38. NOT A FROWN FURTHER

In the classroom, Sal is crying and whimpering while Tony and Sebert flail their arms, shouting at imaginary demons. Lonnie is hiding behind the table. 8Handz worries that they overdid the drugs, but Felix insists he followed the instructions; still, they need to speed up the action in order to finish by the time the official play ends.

Just as Prospero uses magic powers to bring down his enemies, Felix uses the fantastic illusions produced by drugs. However, Felix's tactic makes clear how much his powers depend on external help, like that which he receives from 8Handz.

On Felix's cue, Red Coyote and TimEEz (as Stephano and Trinculo) "prance" into the classroom, to the alarm of all the politicians. They begin to make fun of the drugged men, saying they could "put them on show" as "street people. Addicts. Dregs of society." Red Coyote points out that lots of people would be interested in seeing Ministers high on drugs.

The prisoners are voicing the exact sentiments that the politicians have displayed towards them by using the prison for photo-ops and condemning its residents. Even though they are ostensibly powerless compared to the politicians, they have managed to make them feel the sting of imprisonment.

A moment later Leggs (as Caliban) enters with his back-up dancers and launches into the new number he's written for this moment. The politicians, he says, have "been callin' me a monster," but they're the ones who "stole…cheated…bribed…[and] lied." He points out that they're really the "monstrous" ones in this situation. Tony and Sal start shrieking, while Lonnie begs them to pull themselves together.

In his rap, Leggs shows how much the stigma of criminality depends on social perception, rather than actual deeds. Arguably, the politicians have harmed more people with their policymaking than the prisoners have with their petty crimes; but until now, they've been insulated from retribution by their privilege.

Seeing how scared the men are, even 8Handz starts to soften; he asks Felix if he feels sorry for them. In Felix's ear, Miranda whispers that she would feel sorry for them, "were I human." Felix begins muttering a response, using one of Prospero's lines to Ariel. When 8Handz looks at him in confusion, he reocovers himself and instructs his assistant to cue the goblins. Miranda whispers that she will do it, and asks Felix in a whisper if he loves her.

Even though Felix feels he's undertaken this project of revenge on Miranda's behalf, it's actually her spirit who speaks against it. She's grown from a creation of Felix's imagination to someone who can argue against him and push him to change himself—she can even question if his behavior towards her really constitutes love.

CHAPTER 39. MERRILY, MERRILY

The goblins take their captives back to the main room; by now the drugs are wearing off, and they're settling down. Everyone is assembled except for Anne-Marie and Frederick. To a magnificent drum roll, Felix finally appears, arrayed in his **magic garment**. He greets them with one of Prospero's speeches but then breaks character to thank Lonnie for his good behavior. Everyone is astonished to see him, as he's been so long absent from their lives. Sal asks if he's even a real person.

It's important that Felix chooses to appear in the magic cloak, a garment that emblematizes both his failures and his determination to overcome them. In a sense, he's reminding the politicians of his previous defeat even as he seems omnipotent in this moment. He's finally chosen to embrace the possibilities for success and failure that are intrinsic to his own character and everyone else's.

Tony alone is immediately angry, accusing Felix of sabotaging him, and threatening to end the literacy program. Felix waves away their threats and starts making his own demands: he wants his job at the festival back, and he instructs Sal and Tony to tell the world that after experiencing the benefits of "artistic immersion" they are guaranteeing five more years of funding for the program. After this, Tony must resign and Sebert must take himself out of the leadership race.

Felix's first demand, the return of his job, benefits himself; however, the other aspects of his revenge are actually good deeds towards others. By saving the theater program, he's helping to create a healthier prison environment for his students, and by removing dirty politicians from power he's doing a service to the public at large.

To enforce his demands, Felix reveals that he's captured all their drug-induced raving on video—an embarrassing spectacle that would damage careers if released to the public. Addressing Tony directly, he reminds him about the "fascinating conversation" he had with Sebert while the others were asleep. Finally, Tony appears defeated and admits he has no choice but to acquiesce. Felix adds that he wants an early release for his special-effects technician.

The politicians entered the prison believing in a strict delineation between themselves and those deemed "criminal" by society. Now, having unwittingly participated in criminal activity on tape, they are stripped of the security and self-righteousness such a worldview provides.

Sal immediately agrees to the agreement, while Tony and Sebert stare resentfully at him. Lonnie asks if the riot was real at all, but Felix ignores him. Gesturing to Sal, who is still worried about Frederick, he says he has something to show him.

Felix again refuses to make definitive statements about the "reality" of theater, preferring to focus on its ability to reveal deep truths even as it depends on illusions.

In their cell, Anne-Marie tells Frederick to act surprised when his father enters. When Sal enters the cell, father and son embrace eagerly; pulling away, Frederick introduces his father to "my new partner, Anne-Marie Greenland." Anne-Marie shakes Sal's hand, while Frederick eagerly asks her if she's free for dinner that night. Felix shrugs, saying that no one can fight "true romance."

When they entered the prison, Sal and Frederick felt uneasy with each other; although their worldviews are still very different, each is filled with a new appreciation for the other because of Felix's revenge. With his reference to "true romance," Felix points out that illusion can lead to genuine and positive feelings.


Leaving the cast behind, the politicians are escorted back to the prison lobby. They're scheduled to attend an after-party with the Warden and other officials: doubtless a calmer affair than what they've just endured. Felix wonders if they will make any allusions to the "lockdown" or their hallucinations. Probably not—instead, they'll compliment the Warden on the programs he's running, and promise to continue his funding. Sal can still preserve his political career, while Tony and Sebert will keep quiet in order to secure positions on corporate boards once they retire.

After falling victims to his play, the politicians essentially have to perform another when they attend the Warden's party. Felix's musings on their probable actions reflect the extent to which the "reality" of public life is in fact a kind of play, in which each actor tries to create the most compelling and self-serving illusions.


Frederick and Anne-Marie follow them to the reception, but first she kisses Felix on the cheek and says she wishes he really was her dad—he would be an improvement on her actual father. She speaks glowingly of Frederick, saying that he got his part right away.

Felix is used to thinking of himself as a deficient parent. Mentoring Anne-Marie gives him an opportunity to redeem his past behavior and improve his own self-conception.


Felix and 8Handz gather up all the speakers and videos they've distributed across the rooms. As 8Handz reviews the video footage, he says that he's hearing a faint singing in his headphones. Someone is saying "merrily, merrily" over and over again. Felix recognizes this from one of Ariel's speeches, and he knows that Miranda is saying her lines.

In that she seems to be appearing to other people, Miranda is at her most "real" right now—but paradoxically, these are also the moments in which she seems most inscrutable to Felix and farthest from his control.

However, 8Handz corrects him: the voice is singing the children's rhyme "merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, life is but a dream." Felix used to sing that song to Miranda when she was a child. He feels chilled, and to cover up his unease he tells 8Handz that he was thinking of inserting that rhyme into the backstory, as a rhyme Prospero sang to Miranda as a child. He asks to try the headphones, but he can't hear any singing.

The fact that 8Handz perceives Miranda's song makes her seem real, but the song's words suggest that her "life"—inasmuch as she exists to Felix—is only a fiction. This pivotal moment juxtaposes Miranda's importance to Felix with her fundamentally illusory nature.

In the darkness, Felix walks towards his car and drives away from the **prison**. He'll be eating dinner alone as usual, unless Miranda appears. He's succeeded in his quest, but he still feels it's been a "letdown." One of Prospero's lines – "the rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance"—occurs to him, and he thinks it's Miranda speaking to him.

Felix has always secretly hoped that The Tempest would bring Miranda back to him—since it can't actually reincarnate her, the play is necessarily a "letdown." Its ultimate result is not erasing Felix's grief, but forcing him to confront it.

CHAPTER 40. LAST ASSIGNMENT

Before his last class, Felix slits open twenty bags of potato chips, inserts cigarettes inside, and reseals them with a heat crimper. The next day he meets Anne-Marie at the **prison**; everyone has insisted she attend the cast party. Frederick wanted to come too, but she told him it was just "for the guys." She tells Felix that WonderBoy has finally stopped pursuing her and accepted that their relationship only existed within the parameters of the play.

Already, it seems that Anne-Marie and Frederick are an established couple. It's interesting that she contrasts him with WonderBoy—after all, both relationships began as existing only in the play. This juxtaposition suggests that illusion best leads to genuine feelings in cases where compatibility already exists.

As Felix goes through security, Dylan and Madison congratulate him on the play, saying it exceeded their expectations. Anne-Marie gives the guards some cookies while they ask about the next year's production.

Although Dylan and Madison see nothing unusual about the play, in fact it has transformed both Felix and Anne-Marie's lives and futures.

When the cast has assembled, Felix warmly congratulates them on their performance, ironically dubbing it an "excellent demonstration of the practical uses of theatre arts" and reminding them that they've saved the Literacy Through Literature program for future prisoners. He tells them it's the best production of *The Tempest* he's ever directed (actually, it's the only one).

Theater is "practical" for the prisoners because it gives them new skills and allows them to experience personal growth, thus empowering them to successfully reenter society. However, it's also been more immediately empowering in that it allows them to challenge the very status quo leading to their imprisonment and stigmatization.

Leggs raises his hand and expresses the admiration of all the actors for Felix. He's actually blushing as he speaks. Felix bows modestly and changes the subject: it's time for the final assignment—the different teams' presentations about the afterlives of their characters.

Felix has earned the respect of the prisoners not just by allowing them to wreak havoc on dirty politicians but by being one of the few people to look past the stigma of imprisonment and appreciate their potential.

CHAPTER 41. TEAM ARIEL

Clearly anxious, 8Handz stands to present Ariel's report, acknowledging his other team mates. At the beginning of the class everyone liked to think of Ariel as an alien from outer space, but the team has changed their mind—just as Ariel changes Prospero's mind and coaxes him from "revenge to forgiveness." Ariel is not an alien but a holographic projection—thus, he can move quickly, become invisible, and be in separate places simultaneously.

With his sensitivity towards the politicians, 8Handz helps Felix move towards forgiveness, just as Ariel does for Prospero. Interestingly, the ghostly Miranda has spurred Felix towards forgiveness as well, showing how she's able to take on Ariel's role as well as the filial and obedient position she's always occupied.

In the team's narrative, Ariel isn't controlled by Prospero; rather he's a holographic projection of "weather systems," which is how he has so much control over the weather. After Prospero releases him from his service, he "flies off to tackle climate change," because he wants to work on a project where he can be useful but not have to obey someone else all the time. Felix nods approvingly, telling them the story is very inventive.

In a way, Ariel's projected future reflects the prisoners' wishful thinking—they all want to live useful lives while being free of subjugation. By encouraging them to imagine new lives for the characters, Felix actually gives them a space to articulate their own desires, and assures them that their wishes are valid.

CHAPTER 42. TEAM EVIL BRO ANTONIO

Full of swagger, SnakeEye comes to the front of the room while everyone else falls silent. He starts off by remarking that Antonio is "the most hardcore evil guy in the play" and never does a single good deed; at the same time, his villainy is partly Prospero's fault because he never does anything to check his behavior before the coup. Even when he's humbled at the end of the play, Antonio doesn't formally apologize, and he's likely less remorseful than furious that he's been caught.

SnakeEye's analysis of Antonio is eerily reminiscent of Tony—who, after all, never really apologizes to Felix. It's also descriptive of his own character, since he's notably unrepentant about his real estate scheme. Even though SnakeEye has been pretending to be someone else throughout the play, the process has given him some insight into his own character.

In the team's narrative, Antonio boards a ship back to Naples with the rest of the characters and starts plotting with Sebastian again. Eventually, they smother Alonso and kill Ferdinand and Prospero; Prospero is now defenseless against them because he has let Ariel go. The villains rape Miranda, inviting Caliban to join in; but when Caliban objects to throwing the girl overboard, they kill him too. In summary, Antonio acts exactly "like what you'd expect him to," and Prospero is oblivious to the danger his brother poses, just as he was the first time.

In a way, SnakeEye's imagined future reflects badly not just on the murdered characters but the prisoners as well. It suggests that those who have historically held power—like Tony and Sal—will continue to wield it, despite their evident villainy. Even though the prisoners have used the play to empower themselves, SnakeEye suggests that the freedom it provided is fleeting.

Everyone is silent at the end of this grim conclusion, but Felix concedes that the team has done a good job and awards them full points. He asks the class to think about who might save Prospero and Miranda in such a situation, and PPod says the sailors might help them. Everyone seems to take hope from this possibility.

Even though the prisoners hated Prospero at the beginning of the play, now they're rooting for him and Miranda. Like with Felix, their perspectives have evolved over the course of the production.

CHAPTER 43. TEAM MIRANDA

Anne-Marie interrupts Felix as he starts to call up Team Gonzalo; she wants to provide her own ending for Miranda. Striding to the front of the room, she accuses everyone of treating Miranda like a "rag doll" waiting to be raped, when she's actually the opposite: a tomboy accustomed to running all over a wild island and fending off the dangerous advances of Caliban. Moreover, it's probable that Prospero taught her a little magic in all the years they spent alone together.

One of the problems with Felix's and the prisoner's interpretation of the play is the passive role to which it consigns Miranda. Anne-Marie is the only person who challenges this stance—interestingly, she does so just as Felix's own Miranda is starting to grow into her own and challenge her father.

In Anne-Marie's narrative, Miranda thinks up a charm to lure Ariel's protective spirit onto the ship with her; she fills the ship with cowslips, a flower that always tempts the spirit, and uses magic to conjure up a hive of bees. Even though it's an illusion, Ariel is entranced and follows her onto the ship.

In Anne-Marie's narrative it's not Ferdinand who inherits Prospero's power at the end of the play, but his daughter Miranda.

Anne-Marie kicks off her boots and jeans to reveal her dance leotard and tells the class to imagine the villains sneaking toward Alonso's cabin and getting in fight with Ferdinand on the way. Ariel warns Miranda, who runs to the scene and breaks Sebastian's wrist. She accompanies her narrative with a warlike dance routine, which elicits cheers from the class.

Anne-Marie's enthusiastic defense of Miranda reiterates the possibility of transformation and evolution even within a play that has existed for centuries; she uses an old plot to articulate a new vision of female empowerment.

However, Miranda still has to handle Antonio and Caliban, so she calls in the three goddesses. Anne-Marie whips out the three dolls, whose eyeballs have been painted white, and whirls them around her head. The goddesses, she says, incapacitate Antonio while Miranda jumps Caliban and dislocates his arms. Her story ended, Anne-Marie gives a prim curtsy. Stunned and impressed, everyone claps.

When she started working with Felix, Anne-Marie would never have loosened up enough to perform such a fantastical routine. Her prim gesture at the end is a nod to the persona she inhabited in her first appearances, and demonstrates the extent to which she, like Felix, has changed as a result of her work in the prison.

CHAPTER 44. TEAM GONZALO

While the class takes a coffee break, Felix asks Anne-Marie if the goddesses really would have been able to exercise the power with which she imbues them. After all, in the play they're just illusions conjured by Ariel. Anne-Marie shrugs and says they can be real goddesses if that's what she wants.

It's interesting and a little comic that, while Felix gives himself total liberty to transform the play for his own goals, he still resists the attempts of others to do so—especially when it involves changes to the cherished role of Miranda.

Representing Team Gonzalo, Bent Pencil makes his way to the front of the classroom and gravely thanks the rest of his team. He says that one can think of the play in terms of optimistic characters—like Ariel, Miranda, and Ferdinand—and negative ones—like Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian. With his naïve and idealistic persona, Gonzalo is the most positive of the characters. However, Gonzalo is also completely powerless, and his lack of agency suggests that "extreme goodness [is] always weak."

It's interesting that Bent Pencil makes this point about Gonzalo, since Lonnie's combination of goodness and lack of agency have made the same suggestion. In a way, Felix's effort to acquire power and achieve revenge is also an attempt to differentiate himself from Lonnie, and prove that good people don't always have to lack power.

Bent Pencil asks the class to suppose that all goes well at the end of the play, and everyone sails back to Naples to celebrate Ferdinand and Miranda's wedding. Gonzalo returns to King Alonso's court, but the monarch is so grateful for his loyalty that he offers him whatever he wants. Given power for the first time in his life, Gonzalo retains his goodness: he goes back to the island and sets up a utopian kingdom with "no differences of rank and no hard labor" or crime.

Bent Pencil's imagined future is diametrically opposed to SnakeEye's: rather than imagining a world in which only the strong and devious survive, he suggests that those who deserve power will eventually attain it. However, Felix himself has shown that it's almost impossible to attain power without at least a little scheming.

When the report is ended, Felix asks curiously how this project turns out. Bent Pencil says he will have to imagine it. Gonzalo doesn't have any magic to enforce his wishes, but perhaps the "better natures of other people" will make his republic a success. Felix then calls up Team Hag-Seed to give the last report.

In a way, Bent Pencil's last remarks reflect the atmosphere of Felix's classes in the prison. He has no real power over his students, but by trusting in their "better natures" has achieved extraordinary results.

CHAPTER 45. TEAM HAG-SEED

Leggs stands up to give the report. He starts out by saying that while he has a team, in the play Caliban has no one; even his temporary allies turn on him or try to exploit him. His mother wasn't perfect, but she's the only person who loved him. Other actors nod, and Felix senses that "tough though fallible mothers are being remembered." After her death, Caliban was kind to Prospero, but now the magician is trying to enslave him.

At the beginning of the course, all the actors identified instinctively with Caliban. While that's still the case, the villain's isolation now points out the positive aspects in their lives—like the community they've developed through this class. Even in his predicaments, Caliban represents the prisoners' increasing empowerment.

His team has mulled over various outcomes for Caliban. He could be left on the island as its king, but this would hardly be satisfying with no one around to rule. In another narrative, he sails to Naples with the others; Antonio kills Prospero and rapes Miranda, but he locks Caliban in the hold and puts him on show for money once they reach Italy. They tell everyone he's a "savage from the jungle" and the people hate him and throw things at him. After a while, he catches a disease to which he's not immune and dies.

In this outcome, Caliban's fate reflects the exploitation and murder suffered by countless native people at the hands of colonialist systems. It's much like SnakeEye's prediction that power can only belong to those villainous enough to acquire it—but the Hag-Seed team adds a layer of social commentary to their report.

However, the team decided this outcome was far too grim—after, all everyone else gets a second chance at the end, so why not Caliban? Struck by one of Prospero's lines, in which he says "this thing of darkness I acknowledge mine," the team decides that Prospero is actually Caliban's father, having seduced Sycorax—who, after all, has magic powers just like him. Prospero leaves Sycorax to her fate, but when he gets to the island he immediately recognizes his son. While he doesn't want to formally acknowledge him, he tries to befriend him and teach him some skills—until Caliban starts chasing Miranda, after which he turns on him and enslaves him.

While the prisoners generally dislike Prospero, this narrative gives equal weight to the wizard's strengths and failings—he tries to be a good parent when he discovers Caliban, but in the end he's not brave enough to acknowledge his paternity and fails his son. In his honest but crucially unsuccessful efforts as a parent, this version of Prospero is very reminiscent of Felix himself—much more so than the omnipotent image he himself tries to project.


Still, Prospero can see that his son's bad qualities—anger and hunger for revenge—are exactly what make them alike. So after the play he tries to make up for his behavior, giving Caliban some new clothes and teaching him manners; now people think of him as "rugged," not ugly. When they get back to Milan, Prospero helps Caliban get his start as a musician, and his career takes off. He has a band called "Hag-Seed and the Things of Darkness" and becomes famous all over the world. Everyone loves the report, and the prisoners stand up, chanting Hag-Seed's name.

It's interesting that the characteristics Prospero and Caliban share—feelings of anger and revenge—are also part of what bind Felix and the prisoners together. One of the reasons Felix has been so successful as a teacher is that he doesn't try to force the prisoners to forget about their unpalatable feelings, but teaches them to harness them for their own benefit.

CHAPTER 46. OUR REVELS

Felix hands out the bags of potato chips; everyone starts joking and clowning, although Felix knows they'll start haggling over the cigarettes as soon as he's gone. Taking Felix aside, Anne-Marie tells him how grateful she and "Freddie" are to him for throwing them together.

Anne-Marie probably understands better than Frederick the extent to which their relationship was planned. However, knowing this doesn't make her think her feelings are any less real.


Leggs announces that he and his team have a surprise: an extra number they wrote about Hag-Seed, part of a musical they're working on. In the musical, Stephano and Trinculo have put Hag-Seed in a cage to show him off, but he breaks free and sings about his freedom. The team starts the beat while Leggs returns to his Caliban persona, saying that he's done with chores for other people. He's not going to "walk behind you on the street" or "get on the back of the bus," and the people who stole his land can give it "right back to us."

In this final performance, Leggs and his team link Caliban explicitly to the struggles of different marginalized groups—from African Americans during the Civil Rights Movement to First Peoples trying to reclaim sovereignty over their land. While Caliban used to evoke their oppression and powerlessness, now he's a much more positive figure, evoking the fight for dignity and justice.


Hag-Seed continues to protest at the injustices to which his masters have subjected him: they make him work for less than minimum wage and earn profits by putting him in jail. They think of him as "an animal, not even a man." Now, Leggs says, Hag-Seed is becoming more powerful than those who oppress him: "Hag-Seed's black and Hag-Seed's brown…Hag-Seed's yellow and Hag-Seed's trash white, he goes by a lotta names, he's roaming in the night."

Referring obliquely to the prison-industrial system here, Leggs uses the figure of Caliban to discuss the extent to which incarceration has emerged as a new tool of social oppression, rather than a just system of punishment—just as Caliban's imprisonment is more a function of Prospero's desire for control than a repercussion for a specific misdeed.

Felix commends them on the powerful text, and Anne-Marie asks what happens once Caliban escapes. Leggs says that he will seek revenge on those who have harmed him; but he's not yet sure whether this category includes Prospero and Miranda. Felix is interested to see that "Caliban has escaped the play," in which he's always imprisoned. Leggs asks Felix if he'll direct the musical once they've finished it, and although he pretends to consider the question, he's secretly very pleased.

For Felix, the important aspect of the new Caliban is that he's free to write his own script now. In a sense, this is true of the prisoners as well—although their material circumstances have not changed, Felix has helped them develop the skills and confidence to analyze their lives and articulate their hopes for the future.

CHAPTER 47. NOW ARE ENDED

As the cast party is drawing to a close, 8Handz reminds Felix about the ninth prison, the one they couldn't identify before. Felix explains that while Prospero triumphs in the end, he also loses Miranda and Ariel, the two people to whom he was closest. As he prepares to give up his magic powers in the last scene, Prospero feels trapped and tells the audience that unless they deem the play a success, he'll be doomed to live on the island alone "by their spell." He also asks the audience to pray for him, seeking a divine pardon for his crimes.

Felix imagined that his successful revenge would bring about uncomplicated feelings of triumph, but just like Prospero, he's feeling new kinds of loss and dissatisfaction. Moreover, like Prospero Felix has based his self-worth on the power he can wield over others. Now that he's accomplished his revenge and relinquished this power, he has to frame his self-conception in a new way.

Prospero never explains what exactly he feels guilty about, but Felix posits that since *The Tempest* is essentially about Prospero producing his own play, "maybe the fault for which he needs to be pardoned is the play itself." No one understands at first, but Felix reminds them that he engenders a lot of anger and suffering during the play, for which he now wishes to be forgiven.

Prospero considers himself righteous and justified in his revenge until the end of the play, when doubt finally kicks in. Similarly, it's only once he's accomplished his own revenge that Felix begins to wonder if the whole process was worth it.

In light of this, the ninth prison is actually the play itself, in which—unless the audience helps him out—Prospero will be trapped forever, reliving his feelings of revenge. Felix points out that Prospero's last line is "set me free," a phrase he would never use unless he felt imprisoned.

Even though Prospero is responsible for jailing many of the play's other characters, he too feels he's imprisoned—suggesting that one can't be entirely free while one is responsible for other people's imprisonment.

As she walks out of the classroom with Felix, Anne-Marie is almost tearful. Dylan congratulates her on her cookies and Felix on his play. They're looking forward to seeing him next year. As Felix drives home, he surveys the melting snow; it's almost spring, and he feels like he's been in the **prison** for years. He looks around for Miranda, wondering if she left the party with him; in fact, she's in the back seat, seeming sad to leave behind all the exciting and wonderful people of the play.

Even though Felix has staged a magnificent production of The Tempest in her honor, his relationship with Miranda is largely unchanged—she still exists only to him and he hasn't extricated himself from his dependence on her presence. While theater can help him expose hidden truths, it can't provide a magical solution to his grief.

EPILOGUE: SET ME FREE

Felix is packing up the few possessions he has in his cottage. After his electricity went out recently, he's found that Maude and her family have deserted their farmhouse; now, except for a stack of bills, it's as if they'd never been there, or as if they existed only as long as Felix needed them.

In a way, Maude and her family are like the goblins in The Tempest—they exist only as long as they have utility to the protagonist. Their sudden absence contributes to the surreal nature of Felix's self-imposed exile.

Felix has finally been able to make his enemies suffer, and he's followed his revenge with benevolent acts of forgiveness. Having lost his political power, Tony won't be able to get back at Felix; he is out, and Felix is "in, which is as it should be."

Even though Felix has embraced the idea of transformation in himself and others, he retains a rigid and unchanging view of his relationship with Tony.

Felix has even gotten his old job back and could stage the *Tempest* he originally envisioned, but he knows he can't improve on his last production. In fact, he's realized that it's time to let younger people take over the festival, so he's training Frederick as an Assistant Director and hiring Anne-Marie to choreograph the musicals that are being added to the festival.

Like Prospero, Felix gives up his power just as he attains it again. However, unlike Prospero, Felix does so with a sense that he's helping future generations—and maybe even paving the way for a new era in his own life.

It's wonderful to see the young people working together, full of enthusiasm and wonder for set designs and **costumes**. Watching them, Felix feels a "strange mixture of nostalgia for the past mixed with joy for the future." He's glad to have helped them get a start in this difficult industry. Even Sal has accepted his son's unconventional career choice, so relieved is he that he's survived the "riot."

At the beginning of the novel, Felix was incapable of taking such wholehearted pleasure in the well-being of others. This moment shows how much he's changed. It also points out implicitly that it's Felix's own drive for revenge which has allowed him to help his protégés in their careers.

Meanwhile, Estelle has arranged for Felix to go on a cruise, which she presents as a relaxing break after the last stressful months. He won't have to pay for anything as long as he gives some lectures about his work in the prison system. She's going on the cruise as well, and will be able to keep him company. At first Felix was hesitant to join a bunch of old people doddering around the deck, but he's realized that as long as he's on "the road to death," he might as well enjoy the ride.

Just as The Tempest ends with the main characters sailing back to Naples, the novel ends with a journey by boat. However, while Prospero is feeling lonely and unsatisfied at the end of the play, Felix is clearly on the brink of a new relationship —the ship is a marker of new beginnings, rather than definitive endings.

Felix has accepted the offer but stipulated that 8Handz come as well. He's finally been granted parole, and Felix wants to keep an eye on him during the precarious period of reentry into society. He's going to help Felix out with the lectures on the ship, and maybe he'll be able to meet some businessmen who can put his tech skills to use. When she hears this suggestion, Estelle smiles and squeezes Felix's arm.

Again, it's Felix's revenge that secures early parole for 8Handz. While his intentions were largely self-centered, the results have been beneficial to many people around him. In fact, Felix's own reward consists mostly in observing the happiness he has facilitated.

Now, Felix surveys his **magic garment**, and impulsively decides to take it on the cruise. He leaves the staff, which is no longer magic but only a "wooden stick." Sudden he realizes how wrong he's been about his *Tempest*; he always thought of it as an attempt to revive Miranda, but he's actually been attempting something much different.

While Felix has scratched his itch for revenge, his grief for Miranda is much harder to dispel—he can't cure it by humiliating an enemy. The play has fulfilled one of his goals, but he's come to realize that it has no real bearing on the other.

Felix picks up the photo of his daughter that rests on his night stand. Miranda is there in the past, but she's also watching him as he prepares to leave the cottage where he has trapped them both for so long. It seems like she's "fading" and "losing substance," but he can tell she's asking if she must "accompany him on the rest of his journey."

Felix is most resistant to transformation when it comes to his daughter; in the spirit he's conjured up he's tried to forestall not only her inevitable death but all the changes that attend the growth of a child. Now he realizes that his refusal to accommodate change has not protected his daughter, but trapped her.

Felix asks himself why he's forced Miranda to stay with him for so long, doing everything he asks. He's been selfish, but now he can see what she really wants, and what he must do for her. Speaking directly to her, he says, "to the elements be free."

In this final passage Miranda becomes Ariel, as Felix liberates his daughter's memory—but just as importantly, he gives himself permission to make a new start in his own life.

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