



The Tempest and Hag Seed

Textual Conversations

What is a Textual Conversation?

Module A Textual Conversations is a comparative study based on two texts with the second text in conversation with the first through reimagining or reframing. You are required to compare and contrast the two texts, seeking to appreciate how and why the most recent composer would have chosen to use the first text. Through the process of comparison, you draw conclusions about the way one text converses with the other.

The Rubric

- } In this module, students explore the ways in which the comparative study of texts can reveal **resonances and dissonances** between and within texts. Students consider the ways that a reimagining or reframing of an aspect of a text might **mirror, align or collide** with the details of another text. In their textual studies, they also explore common or disparate **issues, values, assumptions or perspectives** and how these are depicted.
- } By comparing two texts students understand how composers (authors, poets, playwrights, directors, designers and so on) are **influenced by other texts, contexts and values**, and how this shapes meaning.

Breaking Down the Rubric

Terms from the Rubric	Meaning
resonances	To agree.
dissonances	To disagree or contradict.
mirror, align or collide	Mirror = reflect/copy Align = agree, be similarity Collide = be different
common	shared ideas and themes
disparate	separate and different ideas and themes
influenced by other texts, contexts and values	How the modern text relies on the original, and how both are impacted by the context and values of their times.

issues, values, assumptions or perspectives

What issues are explored? What values are foregrounded? What assumptions are made? Whose perspectives are promoted?

identify, interpret, analyse and evaluate

You need to analyse, evaluate and appreciate (ALARM).

textual features, conventions, contexts, values and purpose of two prescribed texts

You need to know these aspects of each text individually as well as how they are common or different.

understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of both texts has been enhanced through the comparative study

How is your understanding, appreciation, and/or enjoyment of Hag-Seed reliant on knowing The Tempest.

the personal, social, cultural and historical contextual knowledge...influences their perspectives

Context AGAIN, so it is essential to your understanding of the textual conversation.

textual features...various language concepts, for example motif, allusion and intertextuality

How do the techniques and conventions reinforce the ideas and values of the texts? Look at form and genre!

This means that you must compare and evaluate the following features of both prescribed texts to understand how the later text is in conversation with the base text:

- personal, social, cultural and historical contexts
- values
- assumptions
- perspectives
- purpose
- textual features and conventions of form, genre and style
- key concepts/ideas/issues.

You also need to consider how your own context influences your perspectives of the texts so you can express your own conversation, in other words, a considered personal perspective.

The syllabus also says that “When responding to the texts students also need to:

- demonstrate an understanding of how composers are influenced by another text’s concepts and values
- evaluate the relationships between texts and contexts

This requires students to note the re imaginings and changes that are made and consider why Atwood has made these changes. A comparative response demands synthesis and an overarching appreciation and conceptual understanding of both texts in conversation with one another.”

Shakespeare's play The Tempest and Margaret Atwood's novel Hag-Seed fit very well into this module. Atwood has appropriated The Tempest in Hag-Seed, a reimagining of Shakespeare's play, changing the context to re-engage with the values and perspectives for modern audiences. Hag-Seed is in conversation with The Tempest, asking 'What if things were different?' and offering a reply. The resulting common and disparate elements can be attributed to the two different contexts, values and perspectives, but the conversation goes further, with questions of Shakespeare's influence and relevance in the 21st century.



Hag-Seed as a reimagining of The Tempest also reveals how innovating with language, concepts, form and style can bring new meaning to the original text. Atwood uses elements of The Tempest's plot, characterisation, ideas and language in her text to create an innovative and engaging novel for her times.

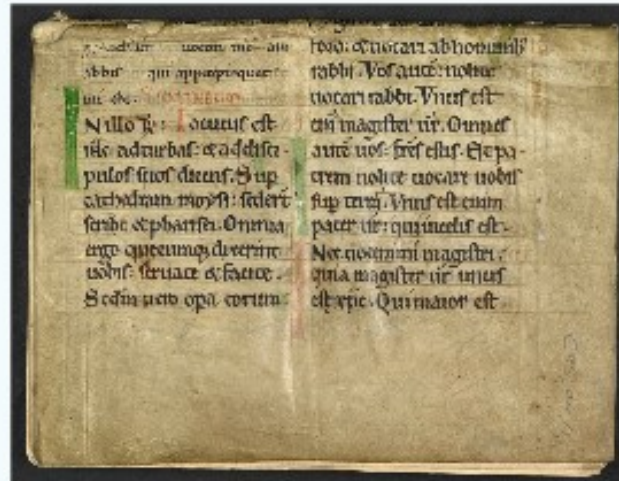


Context: Jacobean times

- } King James succeeded Elizabeth 1, who died without having married or borne children. He was the son of her Catholic cousin Mary, Queen of Scots and had been crowned James VI of Scotland before becoming James I of England. **How is this reflected in the play?**
- } The colony of Virginia in the 'New World' was established in 1610 during James' rule. **How is this reflected in the play?**

Context: Jacobean times

- } In 1597, King James VI of Scotland published a compendium on witchcraft lore called *Daemonologie*. It was also published in England in 1603 when James acceded to the English throne as James I.
- } The book asserts James's full belief in magic and witchcraft, and aims to both prove the existence of such forces and to lay down what sort of trial and punishment these practices merit - in James's view, death.



How is this reflected
in the play?

Context: Jacobean times

- The story of the play is thought to have been **inspired** by Shakespeare's reading of a real-life event described by a voyager: on July 24, 1609 a fleet of nine English vessels was nearing the end of a supply voyage to the new colony of the Bermudas when it ran into “a cruel tempest,” presumably a hurricane.

The link to the play is obvious!

Context: Jacobean times

Michel de Montaigne's essay 'Of the Canibales' was used to help shape Gonzalo's utopia speech. Both outline the characteristics and merits of a Utopian society:

"It is a nation, would I answer Plato, that hath no kinde of traffike, no knowledge of Letters, no intelligence of numbers, no name of magistrate, nor of politike superioritie; no use of service, or riches or of povertie; no contracts, no successions, no partitions, no occupation but idle; no respect of kindred, no use of wine, corne, or mettle. The very words that import lying, falsehood, treason, dissimulations, covetousness, envie, detraction, and pardon, were never heard of amongst them"

Essays of Montaigne translated into English, 1603, page 258

Context: Jacobean times

GONZALO

*I'th'commonwealth I would by contraries
Execute all things. For no kind of traffic
Would I admit, no name of magistrate.
Letters should not be known. Riches, poverty,
And use of service, none. Contract, succession,
Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none.
No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil.
No occupation: all men idle, all,
.....Treason, felony,
Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine
Would I not have;"*

Is this Shakespeare's Utopia?

Context: The novel

- } In 2015, Hogarth Press invited several contemporary novelists to contribute to a project meant to update some of Shakespeare's plays for present-day readership:

Novels:	Rewritings of:
Jeanette Winterson, <i>The Gap of Time</i> (2015)	<i>The Winter's Tale</i>
Howard Jacobson, <i>Shylock Is My Name</i> (2016)	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>
Anne Tyler, <i>Vinegar Girl</i> (2016)	<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>
Margaret Atwood, <i>Hag-Seed</i> (2016)	<i>The Tempest</i>
Tracy Chevalier, <i>New Boy</i> (2017)	<i>Othello</i>
Edward St. Aubyn, <i>Dunbar</i> (2017)	<i>King Lear</i>
Jo Nesbo, <i>Macbeth</i> (2018)	<i>Macbeth</i>
Gillian Flynn, <i>Hamlet</i> (2021)	<i>Hamlet</i>

Context: The novel

- ❖ Margaret Atwood is a decorated Canadian author born in 1939, most famous for The Handmaid's Tale. She has written novels, poetry and essays often expressing her beliefs about contemporary social issues.
- ❖ Her feminist ideas have been widely written about, but she is also a renowned environmentalist.
- ❖ Literature in prisons is also a cause she has championed. Hag-Seed is partly an affirmation of literature's potential to help offenders remake themselves.

Play to Novel

- **Form:** The play, becomes a novel that also remakes the play (this reflects Atwood's postmodernist approach with a mixing of modes)
- **Governance:** The arts program of the novel is not created under the patronage of a King, but rather a board, however both have ultimate responsibility for their world.

- **Prisons / Imprisonment:** Atwood said of writing the novel: “I started counting up the prisons and imprisonments in the play. There are a lot of them. In fact, every one of the characters is constrained at some point in the play...So I decided to set my novel in a prison.
- **Women:** the naïve Miranda of the play, who is exchanged like property between Prospero and Ferdinand, becomes Anne-Marie, a character with power, knowledge and strength.
- **Unchanged attitudes towards the Indigenous** as a marginalised/ignored group represented by the prisoners.

And in Atwood's words!

"Of all Shakespeare's plays, this one is most obviously about plays, directing and acting."

"The play is about illusions: magic is the only weapon Prospero has."

"And it is about vengeance versus mercy, as in so many of Shakespeare's plays."



What resonates?

Prisons:

} Prospero is a prisoner on the island – Felix's grief is metaphorical prison.

} Caliban is the usurped native inhabitant of the island and taught / civilized by Prospero – The literal prisoners in the novel, collectively are the 'Calibans', also being instructed / taught by Felix.

} Alonso, Antonio etc are shipwrecked on the island – Tony, Sal, Lonnie are trapped, 'shipwrecked', in Fletcher Correctional.

What dissonances exist?

Transformation:

} Observing Miranda and Ferdinand, the grief of Alonso and seeing events through the eyes of Ariel, transforms Prospero's vengeance into forgiveness and compassion, even Antonio is forgiven despite never apologizing or reforming – Felix still exacts his vengeance on Tony, Sal and Lonnie so the reader is left to ask if he has truly transformed. **How might context affect this dissonance?**

} Transformation derives from forgiveness in the play – Felix's journey is about resolving his grief.

What dissonances exist?

Caliban (The Hag-Seed):

➤ When The Tempest is seen through a postcolonial lens, Caliban is the indigenous native “This Island is mine, by Sycorax, my mother.”

Caliban is seen to live at peace with nature on the island:

“And then I lov’d thee, and show’d thee all the qualities o’ th’ isle ...Cursed be I that did so!...For I am all the subjects that you have, which first was mine own King” Act 1, Scene 2.

What dissonances exist?

Prospero sees Caliban as savage and uncivilised, and feels the need to civilize him through education and language, but Caliban responds to this by saying:

“You taught me language; And my profit on’t is, I know how to curse”
Act 1, Scene 2.

He also attempts to rape Miranda and Stephano and Trinculo pour wine down Caliban’s throat and reduce him to the level of a slave. At the end of the play Caliban is unrepentant, but he is compliant.



What dissonances exist?

In the novel, the prisoners who act in Felix's play know exactly who they are: they are all Calibans. "We *get* him," they say. They rewrite Caliban's speeches as raps:

"Ban-ban, Ca-Caliban,
Don't need no master, I am not your man!"

The prisoners at Fletcher Correctional Centre, like Caliban, are demonized and marginalized by their society, especially the powerful politicians who occasionally 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. They transform him however, from a victim of oppression into a symbol of empowerment.

What dissonances exist?

At the end of the novel, 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!" making Caliban a representative of oppressed groups and therefore a positive rather than a negative character. Ultimately, it's the prisoners' strong identification with Caliban that inspires them to revolt against the politicians visiting the prison to see their play—men who, in their opinion hold exploitative and disrespectful views on prisoners' rights.

How might context affect this dissonance?

What is mirrored?

Questions of Power and Responsibility

} Prospero has the power of magic, expressed through his knowledge (his book) and also his control of Ariel – Felix's power comes from his knowledge of the 'magic' of the theatre and also technology.

} One of the main questions in The Tempest arises from Prospero's preoccupation with magic to the detriment of his role as Duke, a fact he acknowledges by the end of the play – This question is also raised in the novel. Did Felix's preoccupation with grief affect his role as Festival Director? Was his use of the prisoners at Fletcher Correctional responsible?

What aligns?

As Atwood said, Shakespeare's play is one that deals with "plays, directing and acting"

➤ Both Prospero and Felix are like playwrights controlling the theatre of their own lives. In *The Tempest*, Prospero uses magic to bring about the outcomes that he wants - Felix uses his creative genius as an actor (Mr Duke) and director to manipulate those around him. He flirts with Estelle, the prison advocate who hires him, in order to get special favours 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 brings together his protégé Anne-Marie and the young actor (and son of Felix's enemy) Frederick, prompting them to fall in love.

What aligns?

Form:

} *The Tempest* is structured into 5 Acts - *Hag Seed* is structured into 5 parts.

Form: Masques

➤ In England in Jacobean times, the masque was an elaborate form of entertainment for aristocrats, enjoyable largely because it was interactive. The nobles themselves had a silent part as dancers, while professionals played music, sang, and/or acted. The actual masque occurs in Act IV, scene I, but Prospero is seen to conduct the whole play as a form of masque

What aligns?

The performance of *The Tempest* at Fletcher Correctional is also like a masque, one in which Tony, Sal and Lonnie unwillingly take part, but everyone is also an unknowing participant in the larger masque that Felix has orchestrated in order to exact his revenge.



What collides?

The representation of women:

In Shakespeare's text the only female character is Miranda. Atwood redresses this by creating four female characters in *Hag-Seed*: Miranda, Anne-Marie, Estelle, and the old lady from whom Felix rents his excluded cottage.

In Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Miranda is portrayed as a typical Elizabethan female who will obey her father, Prospero, and marry as he sees fit – Margret Atwood, however, portrays Miranda as an independent woman who is not subject to patriarchal power.

What collides?

Firstly, there is Miranda, the daughter of Felix. He says that his Miranda: “was what had kept him from sinking down into chaos,” (p.15) after the death of his wife Nadia. He dreamt of the two of them travelling together: “he would show her the world, he could teach her so many things. But then, at the age of three...” Miranda died.

Her death is the metaphorical tempest that assails Felix. Her death is “like an enormous black cloud boiling up over the horizon. No: It was like a blizzard.” (p.15)

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What collides?

In his grief, he recreates her in his mind, as part of his conscience, this is the second Miranda, but he also intends to reincarnate her on the stage.

Like Miranda of *The Tempest*, this Miranda of *Hag-Seed* “can’t stray far. Something constrains her.” (p.62) The house is her prison as the island was a prison for the original Miranda.

Like Miranda in *The Tempest*, this Miranda in *Hag-Seed* is a positive aspect of his life as she helps her father to overcome his sorrow. Over the years, in his mind, she grows up and he teaches her many things such as playing chess, but she also comments on his life, influences and advises him, unlike Shakespeare’s compliant Miranda: “she’s making him eat kale.” (p62)

What collides?

Anne-Marie Greenland is the third representation of Miranda in Hag-Seed. Anne-Marie is strong willed and independent. She is not afraid to take on the sole female role in a prison production: “her spine is straight, her head balanced on the top end of it.... (p.151)

When Wonder Boy tries to “mouth mash” Anne-Marie, she is able to protect herself:

“I didn’t want to cripple him,’ said Anne-Marie.

‘But you did?’

‘Only temporarily,’ she said” (p153)

What collides?

By the end of the novel Anne-Marie is directing the Makeshiweg Festival with Freddie as her assistant, a “ruler” in her own right, a role not envisaged for the Miranda of *The Tempest*.



Language: The Tempest

- ❖ **Pathetic Fallacy:** the tempest: “A tempestuous noise of thunder and lightning heard Enter a **MASTER** and a **BOATSWAIN**”
- ❖ Shakespeare often **rearranges subjects and verb**. For example: “I say, by sorcery he got this isle; From me he got it. If thy greatness will Revenge it on him, —for I know thou darest, But this thing dare not”. Caliban’s emotive disclosure offers a different perspective which contradicts Prospero’s version of events. The marked inversion, ‘From me he got it’ highlights his anger and frustration. His objectification of himself as ‘thing’ and his repetition of the verb ‘darest’/‘dare not’ shows Caliban’s fear.

Language: The Tempest

- ❖ Shakespeare also **omits words** to great dramatic effect.

For example, Ferdinand's heavily compressed statement, "He does hear me, / And that he does I weep. Myself am Naples."(1.2.520-521) powerfully expresses his grief at his father's presumed death, and his reflection on the fact that he is now king.

Language: The Tempest

Shakespeare uses many hyphenated words to describe the effect of something new or different. These combinations compress ideas and images as well as lending more verbal musicality to a play that includes many musical sequences.

Some hyphenated words are:

- Act I: thunder-claps, sight-outrunning, a-fire, up-staring, still-vexed, mid-season, watch-dogs, sea-change, blue-eyed, mill-wheels, hag-born, ever-angry, eye-ball, hag-seed, south-west, brine-pits.
- Act II: flat-long, thunder-stroke, sea-swallowed, not-of-the-newest, poor-john, thunder-stroke, high-day.
- Act III: flesh-fly, log-man, still-closing, organ-pipe.

Language: The Tempest

Antithesis suggests that perspectives can be varied for the same object or discovery. Antithesis also adds an element of wit and humour in this play.

For example: "You taught me language; and my profit on't / Is, I know how to curse."

Here antithesis signals the reversal of Prospero's expectations and efforts and that new ideas are not always well received and may have unforeseen or negative consequences.

Visual imagery: Perhaps more than other Shakespeare's plays The Tempest is filled with beautiful visual imagery to capture the sense of wonder in encountering a new place.

You will be able to find these easily yourself!

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Language: The Tempest

Poetry or Prose:

Shakespeare usually uses blank verse, that is to say verse that doesn't have a rhyming pattern at the end of each line. Sometimes he adds rhyming couplets and other times he uses prose. In this play prose indicates a lower class and is used by Stephano and Trinculo.

Prospero's last speech: "Now my charms are all o'erthrown And what strength I have's mine own" is delivered as a series of poetic rhyming couplets suggesting a balance between ideas and harmony following the restitution of his status.

Language: Symbolism in both texts

The Tempest

} *The Tempest*. The play begins with a tempest symbolising chaos and change.

} *The Island*. This is a remote place cut off from the rest of the world, symbolically a prison.

The Novel

} *The Tempest*. The Shakespearean play becomes a symbol of Felix's grief.

} *The prison*. This is Felix's island, symbolically cut off from the rest of the world.

Language: Symbolism in both texts

The Tempest:

} *Prospero's books*. Prospero loses his dukedom because he spends too much time with his books. Caliban tells Stephano to “possess his books; for without them He’s but a sot”. • At the end of the play Prospero promises to “break my staff...[and] drown my book”.

What other symbols can you identify?

The Novel:

} *The Theatre*. For Felix the production of The Tempest is his “book” and his power comes from his knowledge of the ‘magic’ of the theatre and also technology. As Felix says: “...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.”

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Language: Hag-Seed

- } **Pathetic Fallacy:** “It was like an enormous black cloud boiling up over the horizon. No: It was like a blizzard.” (p.15)
- } **Direct allusion** to the original text, quoting in lines such as: “He’ll break his staff, he’ll drown his book, because it’s time for younger people to take over.” (p280)
- } **Allusion and metaphor:** “His magic garment is hanging in there too, shoved to the back. The cloak of his defeat, dead husk of his drowned self.”
- } **Colloquial language:** “There. Not a syllable fluffed.”

Language: Hag-Seed

- } **Anaphora:** “This is the extent of it, Felix muses. My island domain. My place of exile. My penance. My theater.”
- } Atwood plays with **narrative voice**, at times mixing them as in this example to emphasise Felix’s quandary: “She’s not here. She was never here. It was imagination and wishful thinking, nothing but that. Resign yourself. He can’t resign himself.
- } **Exclamation:** “Ejected! Tumbled out! Discarded!”

Language: Hag-Seed

- } There is a wonderful blog site that explores the language of Hag-Seed in detail. It can be found at:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1E8OZAGL5XkfDT1qxT2pIDrFfdC4hcNmM/view>

- } **Remember that any discussion of techniques must be linked to context and meaning.**

Sample Questions

1. You have studied a pair of prescribed texts in Textual Conversations.

How has the context of each text influenced your understanding of the intentional connections between them?

2. Never again will a single story be told as though it is the only one. John Berger

To what extent is this statement true in the light of your exploration of Textual Conversations? In your response, make close reference to the pair of prescribed texts that you have studied in Module A.



Thesis Statements

statement of position about a concept or ideas - not merely about a topic or question

demonstrates perspective and judgement

provides the central point that ties the essay together

is developed throughout the rest of the essay, providing therefore for a

More Notes on Thesis Statements

- The 'thesis statement' needs to be an idea you have developed based on an interpretation of the texts and which responds explicitly to the essay question.
- Interpretation means considering how a text operates on different levels; it is your interpretation of the text that will be at the heart of the essay.
- The thesis statement MUST be linked to the essay question and successfully respond to it.
- The thesis must be logically developed throughout the entire essay, ideally you should make a clear link of every point back to your thesis.

The Two Part Thesis

Utilising a two part thesis is an effective way of setting up your argument. For a two part thesis you will need:

A

strongly worded **thesis statement** providing your perspective on the question/ text/ topic.

A

sub-thesis is provided which elaborates on your thesis and defines key aspects or concepts within the question.

Analyse this introduction from a response that appears in Cambridge HSC Checkpoints English Advanced 2019 and shows one way of approaching Sample C

Texts that engage in transformation or appropriation aim to mirror, imitate or question the ideas and beliefs presented to them by another composer. When exploring and critiquing Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Atwood focuses on the nature of performance and comments on the metatheatrical elements of the original text. On a modern stage where "the house lights dim", her protagonist reinterprets Shakespeare's play. The resulting production both frames the novel and enables Hag-Seed to explore the often subversive power of individual readings. The importance of art is a central theme of *The Tempest*, and Atwood also vividly depicts the illusory nature of performance. Within the texts, the wizardry performed by a theatre director becomes a metaphor for the magic enacted on an island when the protagonists use performances to empower themselves and control the destinies of others.

Analyse this introduction

When reframing or reinterpreting a classic text, composers are able to innovate with language, ideas, form, and style in order to shape a new meaning. Atwood's Hag-Seed reinvents and appropriates Shakespeare's The Tempest to bring new meaning to the concepts of ambition and betrayal. Atwood is able to successfully examine how ambition is perceived in a modern context while still exploring the universal issue of betrayal. Ambition in Elizabethan times was frowned upon as it took rulers, such as Prospero, away from their responsibilities and for others, such as Antonio, it meant going against the Divine Right of Kings. In modern times ambition is usually seen as a positive attribute exemplified by Tony's rise to a political position. However, in both texts, ambition for personal gain is criticised and is linked to an overall exploration of power and pride. However, Betrayal in both texts is seen as a negative with both composers foregrounding compassion, understanding and forgiveness.

Resources

- } <http://lukebartolo.blogspot.com/2019/03/hag-seed-textual-conversations-with.html> a fantastic site that examines the textual conversation between the two texts in detail.
- } The Tempest and Hag



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