

Discussion of endings illustrates how the story is different for each context

Listing relevant quotations adds more support

Connecting word *in contrast* links ideas

The ending of any text is significant in how the audience judges the key characters and the values they represent; the ending will also be inextricably linked to the story being told. Shakespeare ensured that his audience would be left with a totally flawed and evil character now dead with England at last restored to the rightful King. In a grand and eloquent speech to his army at Bosworth, Richmond uses high rhetoric to denounce the evil of Richard and his supporters “traitors”, “bloody Day”, “England weep in steams of blood”, and “civil wounds”. In comparison “the true successors of each royal house” and “peace lives again” introduce Richmond’s reign. The final word of the play is “Amen”, reinforcing the position of an all-powerful God on the side of Richmond.

In contrast, in 1996 this unforgiving attitude to Richard has changed. For Pacino, it is not just about conscience, morality and usurping the crown: it is about a vulnerable, human being with significant flaws. Pacino does not even include the Richmond speech but instead re-creates the death of Richard with the confusion of a hand-held camera and constant editing so there is a growing sympathy in the way his death is represented. There is no grand celebration but a resigned and stoic honour as Gielgud references Hamlet. “The rest is silence” and Hodge says: “is this it? Is this it?” reinforcing that death in the real world is often unheroic and ordinary. Pacino returns to lines from *The Tempest* creating an awareness of the metatheatrical nature of the text and a symmetry with the opening of the film, where we first heard these lines. Pacino moves out of the camera into darkness and is left without a final speech. Here Pacino is suggesting that humans are flawed but that is what makes us human. He wants his own Americans to embrace the beauty and the lessons of Shakespeare but also to be vigilant in their own political domain.

A brief conclusion makes a strong statement that links both texts to the question

The story of *Richard III* as represented by William Shakespeare has been given another iteration in the form of Al Pacino’s clever, amusing and interesting docudrama. Pacino helps his audience understand the original story but in such a way that never again will a single story be told as though it is the only one.

What makes the writing work:

The comparative essay on *Richard III* and *Looking for Richard* balances the two texts in a response is clearly answering the question. The discussion includes a consideration of context and how this affects the story. Examples are well-selected and the argument is clear and logical. The ideas of the module and the demands of the question are well integrated.

Texts: *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare
Hag-Seed by Margaret Atwood
 (Shakespearean drama and prose fiction)

Module A Question 1: Example C

(20 marks)

The house lights dim. The audience quiets. ON THE BIG FLATSCREEN: *Jagged yellow lettering on black: THE TEMPEST* By William Shakespeare
 Margaret Atwood, *Hag-Seed*

Explain the centrality of the motif of performance in the textual conversation between Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and Margaret Atwood’s *Hag-Seed*.

In your response, refer to the quotation and your understanding of the prescribed texts.

Response by: Kate Murphy

The introduction refers closely to the quotation and makes reference to the main ideas in the module

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.

Explicit connections between the texts are made

The topic sentence links back to the set question

Metatheatrical and metatheatrical statements draw attention to the self-conscious artifice that the texts engage in and demonstrate their inherent performativity. Theatricality and the supernatural are linked within *The Tempest* and *Hag-Seed*, since Felix’s commitment to “a world of illusions” is equated to Prospero’s withdrawal from the world as a man who is “stuck in his book/doin’ his magic”. Elizabethan plays were performed on a minimalist stage with a limited number of props, and *The Tempest* contains few stage directions – therefore, references in the dialogue to “marvellous sweet music”, and even “a most majestic vision” contribute to the mood on stage and enhance its theatricality. Within *Hag-Seed*, the “jagged yellow lettering on black” alludes to a subversively modern adaptation of Shakespeare’s script, foreshadowing the transformation of context which shapes the often comic textual conversation Atwood engages in. *Hag-Seed* offers commentary on

References to the Elizabethan context of performance of *The Tempest* assists in

demonstrating an understanding of the conditions that the original performances took place under

A difference between the texts is mentioned. The response sticks closely to the motif of performance mentioned in the set question

The Tempest, clarifying that “the island is a theatre” and arguing that “Prospero isn’t a tyrant”. This is a valid interpretation, given Atwood’s sympathetic appropriation of his character in the form of Felix, “the theatre guy”, whose efforts at “wizardry in the slammer” culminate in an hilarious final assignment where his students offer their apt yet anachronistic thoughts on “the post-play lives” of the characters in The Tempest.

This paragraph moves in between both texts in an integrated manner and addresses the issue of textual form

The use of a variety of textual forms, including rap songs, speeches and playscripts assists Atwood to simultaneously appropriate and critique Shakespeare’s play. Just as The Tempest ends in a soliloquy reminding the audience of “the baseless fabric of this vision”, Hag-Seed emphasises that Shakespeare presents “a play about a man producing a play”. Both texts view the island (or prison) in a theatrical manner, presenting a protagonist whose talents “for the liberal arts” defines their goals and vision. Prospero’s ability to overturn “treason, felony” through magic is reflected in Felix’s desire to avenge himself through deviously using “the strengths of interactive theatre” in a comically reimagined version of Shakespeare’s The Tempest.

The many meanings of the term *performance* are addressed in this paragraph

The conversation between The Tempest and Hag-Seed depends on performances: between characters, within interactions and to an audience. Those who perform literal or theatrical magic do so in order to orchestrate situations that will ultimately lead to revelations about characters. Cheekily describing himself as “an enchanted vision generated by this magic island”, Felix directs a performance to enable his enemies to conform to type by providing them with “time and space” to incriminate themselves. The usurped dukedom of Milan is transformed into modern-day political corruption as Atwood provides a satirical portrayal of postmodern theatre, where “not all here is what it seems”, and audience participation is taken to comical heights. Even the notion that the Fletcher Correctional Players have presented a play “by William Shakespeare” is amusing and debatable, given that their version of “a storm at sea” becomes a performance of a prison riot, blurring the boundaries between art and life to wilfully confuse its audience of characters. The responder is aware of the connections with The Tempest, where “the illusory is real”.

Close references to the quotation reinforce its importance within the response

By performing “his real *Tempest*” with his students, Felix is able to exorcise his demons, forcing his enemies to suffer through their “unwilling interactive participation” in much the same manner that Prospero aims to “put the wild waters in this roar” to ensnare his foes; however, Shakespeare did not use “THE BIG FLATSCREEN” a modern-day technological magic that Felix has access to. The original Prospero is referred to as “a tyrant, a sorcerer”, and thus possesses a level of moral

ambiguity which missing from the “harmless old thespian” embodied in that role of Felix’s alter-ego, Mr Duke. The Tempest and Hag-Seed are equally concerned with “flights of fancy”, using the motif of performance in a metatheatrical manner to both address their audiences and suggest that individuals enact elements of their identities according to circumstances and their position in society.

Atwood’s intertextual references and allusions are playful in their intent, frequently relying on contemporary metaphors to comically suggest alternative possibilities for the individuals in Shakespeare’s The Tempest. Felix finds himself “engaged in this non-reality” through his work as a theatre director, just as Shakespeare’s play aims to make “imagination form a shape” in supernatural spirits. Atwood notes that “there’s never just one answer” in a Shakespearean play, and Hag-Seed is concerned with entering into a dialogue which examines different ideas. When one student suggests that “Caliban should be First Nations”, and when Felix originally plans to portray Ariel as “a transvestite on stilts”, the wilful and culturally embedded possibilities of re-reading classical texts are hinted at. We interpret texts according to our experiences and desires, and Atwood remains conscious of this as she plays her own textual games, paying homage to The Tempest even as her work subverts aspects of the original playscript. Prospero’s desire for “provision in mine art”, and the often flimsy boundary between art and life are poignantly reflected in Felix’s desire to stage The Tempest to artistically connect with his deceased daughter by finding “the daughter who had not been lost” on stage.

The conclusion refers to both texts and links back to the set question.

Just as Shakespeare reminds his audiences that the play is merely an “insubstantial pageant”, Hag-Seed acknowledges that “the tempest is an illusion”. Both texts are acutely conscious of the hypnotic and incantatory purpose of performance and the power of “art to enchant”. If Hag-Seed is more explicit and consistent in its statements about performance, this is a reflection of its role as a text which seeks to reimagine The Tempest within a contemporary context, and thus to suggest the universal power and relevance of classical texts.

What makes the writing work:

This response refers to the central ideas of the module, exploring the textual conversation between The Tempest and Hag-Seed in an integrated manner which demonstrates an understanding of the purpose, context and form of each text. Examples are closely linked to the theme of performance, and its many meanings within the text are discussed. As a response to a particular quotation, the essay refers closely to the excerpt used in the set question.