

# The Tempest and Hag-Seed: Textual Conversations

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It can be argued that Atwood's postmodern text 'Hag-seed' is a modern day extrapolation of Shakespeare's seminal text, 'The Tempest.' Atwood's reinterpretation aids in illuminating Shakespeare's underlying themes by reinterpreting them for modern audiences.

## Context

'The Tempest' was written amid the Jacobean period where there was a shift from medievalist ideals to Renaissance humanism. With this shift, came a transformation in respective values. Prospero, the protagonist, embodies this contextual shift as he changes from a vengeful wizard, to a more compassionate individual. Comparatively, Atwood's text is situated within a post-modern, technological zeitgeist. In doing so, she is able to liken the wizardry of Prospero, to the modern day illusion of technology. By re-contextualising Shakespeare's concepts, Atwood makes the plot accessible and relevant to modern audiences.

## Examples, techniques and analysis

Upon the conclusion of both texts, the central theme of forgiveness becomes apparent and the protagonists, both Prospero and Felix, must forfeit their vengeful plans.

Ariel, Prospero's loyal spirit, prompts Prospero to forgive in "mine would sir, were I human". Ariel's ironic phrase is an allusion to Renaissance humanism, which prompts Prospero to relinquish his magical powers, and forces him to embrace humanist values like forgiveness. As a result of this, Prospero declares he will "break [his] staff, and down [his] book". Such declarations are reflective of him metaphorically severing ties with his medieval and tempestuous values.

Atwood uses her text to create a textual conversation with Shakespeare's piece, however draws upon her post-modern context in order to elucidate the idea of forgiveness for modern audiences. Atwood uses an intertextual reference to 'The Tempest' when "a shadow, a wavering of the light", whispers, "I would, sir, if I were human". While this parallels Ariel's statement in 'The Tempest', Felix's shadowy figure, Miranda, metaphorically reflects his own subconscious, and in adding such detail, Atwood adopts a sense of psychological realism to allow modern audiences to comprehend his transformation from "vengeance" to "virtue". Similar to Prospero, this prompt causes Felix to "break out of [his] cell", metaphorically representing how Felix was imprisoned by his own vengeful plan. In deliberately crafting the text in this way, Atwood enhances the idea that both protagonists were imprisoned by their need for revenge, however their eventual freedom is achieved through forgiveness.

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