

Module A Essay

The enjoyment of reading comes from engaging with the way composers reimagine texts by revealing their resonances and dissonances.

How does Atwood in Hag-Seed reveal the complexity of reconciliation in Shakespeare's The Tempest?

The complexity of **reconciliation in texts** is often explored through the experiences of characters within the novel. Margaret Atwood uses her novel Hag-Seed (2016) to draw on similarities and differences between her novel and Shakespeare's novel The Tempest (1610). Atwood specifically does this through the themes of ambition and betrayal, and imprisonment in order to set up a greater discussion of reconciliation throughout her text.

The characters in Atwood's novel explore the themes of ambition and betrayal in order to set up a cross-contextual importance for reconciliation. The view of ambition and betrayal and the greedy nature of humans is an experience that has been common among contexts. Shakespeare's play explores this through the irony of Prospero. Prospero's self-exculpatory comment 'my library is dukedom large enough' explores this as he is set up to be ironically unwise. In his ambitious quest for knowledge and power he neglected his kingdom and therefore made it easy for his brother to usurp him. Atwood further reinforces this idea through the repetition of values of envy and bitterness throughout her novel in 'that devious twisted bastard, Tony'. The use of this establishes Felix's views towards Tony and therefore establishes the hostile emotions towards Tony that are prevalent throughout the novel. These unforgiving views and bitterness towards the usurper are carried across contexts. The 17th century belief in the Great Chain of Being meant that Antonio was often characterised as inherently evil. This view can be seen in the imagery 'the ivy which hid my princely trunk had sucked my verdure out of'. This further establishes the negative emotions towards Antonio and therefore, continues to establish the need for reconciliation. This is also reflected in a 21st century view of usurpation through the bitterness and hatred that is shown towards Tony in the symbolism of 'Tony the earth-based factotum and gold grubber'. The establishment through this imagery helps Atwood to assert the need for reconciliation and therefore helps to establish the idea of reconciliation throughout the novel. The resonances that are seen throughout and across these contexts in relation to the feelings and emotions experienced with ambition and betrayal help the authors to establish the need for reconciliation in both novels.

The complexity of reconciliation is viewed through the difference of contexts in relation to imprisonment and education as a mechanism to set one free. The dissonances between the novels help Atwood to draw out the need for reconciliation in the novels as well as the need for reconciliation with the original inhabitants of each country. Shakespeare's 17th century view is that of a colonialist. This is represented through the imprisonment of Caliban. The colonial viewpoint was that in order to assimilate the native inhabitants, you must educate them and set them free from the confinements of their culture. The negative sentiments towards this are expressed through Caliban's use of language as a weapon in 'You taught me language and my profit on't be I know how to curse'. This reinforces the value that teaching the native people your language is the way to set them free. Atwood's context collides with this view as she holds the 21st century post-colonialist view. Atwood highlights the need for reconciliation through the explicit comparison of both texts. This comparison can be seen in the quote 'In The Tempest, it does say that thought is free but unfortunately it's in a song sung by three idiots'. This comparison highlights the changing views and values between contexts and the differing role of education as a mechanism for freedom. Atwood's context demonstrates that education can be used as a mechanism for freedom, but it is used to create independence rather than to serve the purpose of assimilation. The dissonances that arise between the two texts demonstrate the need for reconciliation between characters as well as highlighting the different 21st century view of education and assimilation.

At the end of both tests, the view of compassion as a mechanism for change is discussed. The need for reconciliation is particularly viewed throughout the comparison of both texts. However, Atwood highlights the 21st century view of forgiveness as being one of necessity rather than out of true compassion and remorse. Shakespeare uses the theme of reconciliation to highlight the need for forgiveness as a catalyst for change. This is highlighted in the statement 'The rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance'. The alliteration of the V draws emphasis to this quote as Shakespeare believed that this was necessary in order to create chance. The explicit reference to this quote in Hag-seed further reinforces the cross-contextual need for reconciliation. The discussion of the view towards forgiveness differs between texts as Atwood further highlights the differences in the contexts and the often-complex nature of reconciliation. Shakespeare uses Prospero's character arc to highlight how easy it was to forgive someone and make amends. This is evident in the symbolism of 'I'll break my staff, bury it certain fathoms in the earth...I'll drown my book'. This demonstrates Prospero's genuine forgiveness and his want to reconcile with his brother. Atwood draws the dissonances as she highlights the complex nature of reconciliation in the 21st century. This is highlighted by Felix's sarcastic tone 'under these conditions I pardon all of you and we'll let bygones be bygones'. Atwood uses the use of his tone to reveal to the reader in a modern context that just because one gives forgiveness, they often do not mean it sincerely. She uses this to draw upon the complex nature of reconciliation in the 21st century and to encourage the audience to reflect upon this within their own lives. The dissonances between these texts helps the reader to develop a greater understanding of the compassion of humanity and the relevance of these themes in a modern context.

In conclusion, the discussion of both texts draws out the cross-contextual need for reconciliation amongst feelings of betrayal and imprisonment and draws out the difference in values between the 21st century and the 17th century. Atwood composed her text to highlight the resonances and the need for reconciliation and does so to bring attention to the reader's view of reconciliation. The Tempest and Hag-seed both reveal the complex nature of reconciliation by discussing the ever-present need for it and the different contextual values surrounding it.

A composer's reimagining of a text, through the addition of contextual knowledge, enhances a responder's engagement and consequently enjoyment of the text. Despite resonances and dissonances which arise due to this contextual knowledge, representations of enduring values manifest within texts. Margaret Atwood's reimagining of The Tempest (1611) by William Shakespeare in Hag-Seed (2016) brings new complexity to ideas conceived about reconciliation in The Tempest. Both Shakespeare and Atwood highlight a need for reconciliation from poor treatment of others and further convey how one may achieve this reconciliation through their characters. Atwood brings complexity to this textual conversation on reconciliation by alluding to a psychological landscape which influences treatment of others and highlighting conscious steps must be taken to achieve genuine reconciliation. This complexity added allows 21st Century readers to participate and enjoy the resonating textual conversation by creating dissonances in representations which foster greater understanding.