

Textual
Conversations:
The Tempest and
Hag-Seed



“This thing of darkness” - The Power of Art and Magic in The Tempest and Hag-Seed

<https://youtu.be/oduJTupbnxs>

Prospero and his 'Art' in The Tempest

- Context and the Tempest – a period skeptical about magical phenomena that was moving away from magic and imagination, towards the Enlightenment defined more by scientific rationalism
- Prospero represents the use of 'dark' art initially, as it materializes his anger and desire for vengeance against his brother
- “Tempestuous noise” “howling” – pathetic fallacy
- “by your art, my dearest father, you’ve put the wild waters in this roar” – draws attention to the metatheatrical illusion of the storm as constructed
- Prospero must overcome his darker impulses during the course of the play

Felix and Art in Hag-Seed

- Prospero's anger and desire for vengeance is reimagined into Felix's grief for the loss of his daughter, as he uses art and performance as a vehicle to keep her alive
- "What to do with such a sorrow? It was like an enormous black cloud boiling up over the horizon. No: it was like a blizzard." - links between grief and how this has become a mental illness.
- In continuing the theatrical motif of a storm in The Tempest, Atwood adapts the utilisation of this chaotic opening to a Canadian context, using the atmospheric upheaval of a "blizzard." Similar to Prospero, it manifests his dark desires and reflects his inner turmoil.
- "For both Prospero and Felix theatre allows a magical transcendence from both their own painful losses and their moral failings" – Nina Cook (The Decline of Magic, The Tempest and Hag-Seed, 2019)

Age of Discovery Vs Post Colonialism in "The Tempest" and "Hag-Seed"



<https://youtu.be/vTQPtAE9630>

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- Indigenous peoples were dehumanised, became a minority and were ultimately 'voiceless' as they did not share the language to fight against their oppression. Their weaponry was also inferior to the conquerors so many perished
 - Post- Colonialism questioned the 'Grand Narratives' and histories prior to the 20th Century, arguing against the notion that indigenous peoples were inferior and barbaric
 - A different historical narrative is told verbally and through art, such as poems, theatre and novels, where the voice of 'the other' or the previously silenced minority groups was finally heard – evident through Atwood's Hag-Seed

'Age of Discovery' and imprisonment in "The Tempest"

- "Hell is empty. And all the devils are here." - island as a place of punishment
- Caliban as imprisoned, enslaved "Freckled whelp hag-born - not honoured with human shape" "a howling monster; a drunken monster!" "mis-shapen knave"
- Perspective from Hag-Seed "he feels that his birthright – the island – has been stolen from him by Prospero, and he wants it restored."

Postcolonial perspective in “Hag-Seed”



<https://youtu.be/Z3ynni9Bm60>

Explore how Atwood has ‘reimagined’ the slavery and colonisation of Shakespeare’s play into a scathing political commentary on the incarceration system in Canada (reflecting a shift in values)

- Reimagined perspective of Caliban into a ‘rap’ “the island is my land, this place was my kingdom! And I was the king!”
- Atwood uses theatre and performance to illustrate values of compassion, a possibility for rehabilitation rejected in her context
- “Prisons are for incarceration and punishment, not for spurious attempts to educate those who cannot, by their very natures, be educated.”
- “Because they’re animals!” Sal almost shouts. “They should all be in cages! They should all be fucking dead!”

Transformation, Freedom, Life as Ephemeral

<https://youtu.be/Z3ynni9Bm60>

Transformation realised through giving up 'art', performance, the illusions of life

- "this rough magic I here abjure" – relinquishing the dark arts "I'll break my staff ... drown my book" – relinquishes his art/magic
- Seeks forgiveness in alignment with Christian Humanist values meta theatrical moment of self-awareness to "let your indulgence set me free,"

Hag-Seed

- "he prepares to leave the full poor cell where she's been trapped with him. Already she's fading.."

Life as Ephemeral, existential

- "like an insubstantial pageant faded"
- It was as if they'd never been there at all ... turned to mist and blended into the fields and woodlots."



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