

## From *The Tempest* to *Hag-Seed*

### Adaptation and appropriation

Linda Hutcheon asserts that an adaptation is 'a derivation that is not derivative—a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing'. Thus, *Hag-Seed* is a derivation of *The Tempest* but it is also a text in its own right, a reimagining for a modern audience.

Atwood stated that adaptations require both a reverence for and willingness to desecrate their source material. This is the crux of the module: how different contexts, values and perspectives account for the common and disparate aspects of *Hag-Seed*.

### Why Atwood appropriated *The Tempest*

*Hag-Seed* takes its place in the Hogarth Shakespeare project which 'sees Shakespeare's works retold by acclaimed and bestselling novelists of today'. *Hag-Seed* is Margaret Atwood's retelling of *The Tempest*. The requirements for a text to be part of the Hogarth collection is that the writers must not lose sight of the original work so that the readers find enough elements that they can recognise from Shakespeare's plays. The commission clearly characterises the novels as adaptations that draw on a prior text consciously and transfigure them to suit the contemporary contexts of their production.

Atwood stated in an interview that the 'The past is powerfully present'. She is able to illuminate through her appropriation of *The Tempest* what Gonzalo refers to as the 'torment, trouble, wonder and amazement' of life., Through Atwood's appropriation, students will be able to acknowledge that Shakespeare's characters such as Prospero and Antonio still walk the streets today and that, despite the shift to a more secular 21st century, his values of moderation, compassion and virtue continue to be guiding principles for humanity. As Bethune (2016) states:

Some part of the playwright's oeuvre always speaks with fresh urgency to the English-speaking world; which plays resonate most at any moment is determined by current fixations and anxieties.

View Atwood's short talk on *Hag-Seed* and her interpretation of *The Tempest* - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2qJpL5cWVFE> and an article on why Atwood chose this play to appropriate - <http://www.macleans.ca/culture/books/margaret-atwood-recasts-the-tempest-inside-a-prison/> and <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/sep/24/margaret-atwood-rewriting-shakespeare-tempest-hagseed>.

She stated that she was attracted to the ambiguity of the play:

I thought of it as a play with some unanswered questions... His multiplicity, his ability to understand human beings... his theatricality.

### Questions about Adaptation

Some of the questions we can ask about adaptation specific to *Hag-Seed* and *The Tempest* are:

- How does this adaptation interact with the original Shakespeare text? (in other words what is Atwood saying to Shakespeare and about Shakespeare's text?)
- How does Atwood want us to interact with the adaptation? (in other words what is Atwood saying to us through her adaptation?)
- What does this text say to us about changing audiences? (in other words what is Atwood saying to us about context and adaptation?)

## Adaptations which resonate

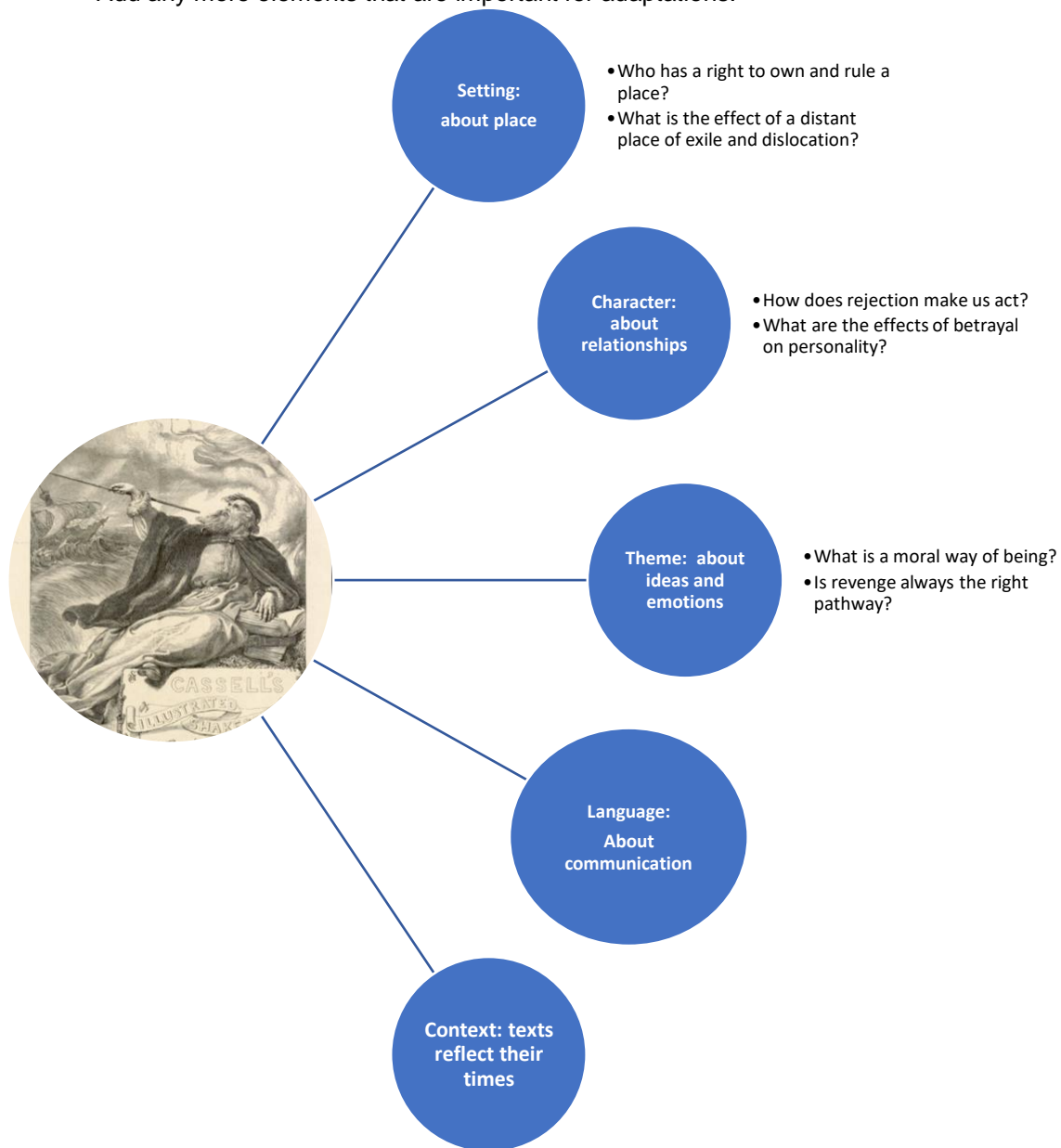
Before we adapt or transform a text we need to ask these questions:

- What is the text about?
- Which elements do we retain and which do we change and which do we discard?
- Which element is the most important in maintaining resonance?

Once we know the text we then need to think about which elements are important for us to retain.

As you read Atwood's text think about the elements listed below and which may have been important to her.

- Which elements has she been most liberal in changing?
- Add any more elements that are important for adaptations.



## Context and values

You need to have an informed understanding of Shakespeare and Atwood's context and values if you are to understand the main ideas of the texts and why Atwood has made changes to the original play.

### Personal

Margaret Atwood is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, has been presented with the Order of Ontario and the Norwegian Order of Literary Merit, and has been awarded 16 honorary degrees. She is Canada's most eminent writers. On the 26<sup>th</sup> September 2018, she was awarded the Adrienne Clarkson Prize for Global Citizenship. Former governor-general and prize namesake Adrienne Clarkson said,

*We want to honour this remarkable citizen of Canada for all she has done in her personal and professional life to make us aware that we are citizens of a country like Canada and a planet that is our precious Earth. In her brilliant writing career and her personal activism locally, nationally, and internationally, she is a dynamic force in the world today.*

Atwood is an avowed environmentalist.

### Personal social and cultural context

- Atwood is an advocate of women's rights. She has cast Ann-Maree as a strong, feisty character.
- She believes in texts having moral dimensions but not being didactic:  
*You can't use language and avoid moral dimensions, since words are so weighted.*
- She is critical of governments using conflict as a means to an end. And is critical of the current president and his fiscal policies:  
*The pen is mightier than the sword, but only in retrospect. At the time of combat, those with the swords generally win.*
- She does not believe in extreme ideologies:  
*I didn't want to become a megaphone for any one particular set of beliefs.*
- And yet, there is certainly a moral and social conscience in *Hag-Seed*. The novel offers a glimpse of how transformational literacy programs in prison can be.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXoFU2JHeUU>.
- Atwood is known to be a committed activist for political and social issues and also for the enhancement of human rights not only in Canada but also in the international sphere.
- She is a staunch advocate for the Arts that she believes is poorly funded in Canada.
- Shakespeare's texts are held in high regard and are referred to as canonical. Hence, the birth in 2015 of the Hogarth series of the retelling of his plays to celebrate Shakespeare's 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Atwood stated about her experience of Shakespeare:  
*He is a big deal when you were studying English.*