 Connecting motifs across the texts

Resonances and dissonances

Performance & theatricality – escaping the prison of perspective

The power of performance is also the power of fiction - both lead us to see ourselves in the imagined space. This might also lead into a discussion of the meta-theatrical and meta-fictive elements of each text.

Students could view the This American Life? Episode where the reporter visits a prisoners’ theatre program that was staging Shakespeare’s plays, as a way of building students’ appreciation of how great theatre can transform lives, [This American Life](https://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/218/act-v)

Books – knowledge shapes our perspective; books as the source of our power

In Chapter 6 (page 39) of the novel, Felix resorts to books and reading as an escape from his reality, and as means of experiencing the “reversal of fate” he so ardently desires. Beyond this, however, his ‘books’ become the prisoners at the gaol. They are his books, his sprites, and his magic.

Magic and the imagined – postmodern breakdown of relations

In ‘The Tempest’, Prospero’s magic is fundamental to the plot of the play, and linked very much to the superstitions and enchantments of Shakespeare’s context. In ‘Hag-Seed’, however, fantasy is arguably replaced by the ‘real’, and the realistically ‘imagined’. Magic can always be explained by the facades and trickery of theatre. The only ‘magical’ presence in the novel, Miranda’s ghost, is a figment of Felix’s imagination. Her ghost fills the void in a postmodern world where meaning and purpose are splintered.

Imprisonment and slavery

Imprisonment is a point of both alignment and collision in the textual conversation that Atwood holds with Shakespeare. We can apply the notion of ‘imprisonment’ to a study of these texts in an endlessly layered way

* Prospero and Felix’s imprisonment
* Ariel/Caliban’s slavery, and Prospero/Felix as slaves to their revenge
* The Fletcher inmates’ imprisonment
* Our own imprisonment within the texts’ conversation, being unable to ‘unsee’ ‘The Tempest’ and read ‘Hag-Seed’ without making connections

Innocence vs. Monstrosity

Innocence is focalised by key characters in both texts - Miranda as a real and imagined daughter, and Prospero and Felix’s innocence in relation to the wrongs inflicted upon them. Juxtaposed to this, however, is the monstrosity of characters such as Antonio/Toni and Caliban/the prisoners. This monstrosity, however, is relative, and entirely dependent upon context, values, and perspective. Consider the dissonance in ‘Hag-Seed’ of the ‘evil’ characters being far less fully formed and characterised than the antagonists in ‘The Tempest’—why?