

Reading and Performing the Tempest in a Prison: Hagseed by Margaret Atwood

Maria Grazia Dongu
University of Cagliari

Abstract

My article aims to analyse Margaret Atwood's *Hagseed* as a rewriting of the educational project orchestrated by Prospero, and as a mirror of the process by which Elizabethan actors created and modified their performance in response to their own and their audiences' needs. Set in a prison and planned as both a rehabilitation for criminals and a vengeance, *The Tempest* is reenacted and adapted in a collective interpretation to suit the inmates' inner turmoil. Unlike Felix, they cannot leave the prison, but they dream of freedom. Freedom they will find by adapting Shakespeare's characters to their world of imagination and experience. Felix will allow them to find their own way of interpreting the text, which is very different from the attitude Prospero takes throughout the text. In the end, the prisoners involved in adapting Caliban will write a sequel to his story, making him (and themselves) the protagonist and author/s of their own story. Undoubtedly functioning as a metatextual reading of the novel itself in relation to its hypo text, the Pirandellian scene allows us to see how a reader can become an author, and how a subordinate and inarticulate group of people can become confident and self-aware enough to reappropriate their own history. Then the Palimpsest is rewritten, bearing the memory of an educational project, but proposing a new one, more appropriate to our times, with new objectives and new tools.

Keywords: hypertext; hypo text; education; prison; self-discipline