

6ET04 A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE COURSEWORK

FOLDER ONE

'The past is a dangerous place; it imprisons man in a world that does not exist.'

To what extent do you agree that this statement adequately describes your chosen texts?

First performed in 1980, *Translations* written by Irish playwright, Brian Friel, is set in an Irish village named Baile Beag. *The Tempest* is a 1611 play, set on a fantasy island, and is the last play written by William Shakespeare. Both plays explore the importance of the past; Friel sets the play in 1833, yet, in showing a society split by external forces (the English), presents events which are still pertinent to the contemporary Troubles of 1980. Shakespeare uses past events in the play to drive the plot, particularly in the theme of revenge, and in doing so shows their continuing impact on the present. The fact that Friel and Shakespeare have characters unable to move on shows that not only does the past "exist", it has an ongoing effect on the present. However, both playwrights question and challenge the perception that the past "imprisons" a man and instead offer suggestions for moving on – a theme considered by authors for many centuries. *Crime and Punishment* (1865) portrays the trials and tribulations of Raskolnikov, a man haunted by past events, almost destroyed by his inability to move on. In this novel, Dostoevsky presents the idea that confession and punishment will free the sinner. Shakespeare uses similar Christian ideals in the god-like figure of Prospero, whose eventual willingness to forgive frees both himself and others; whereas, although also using religious imagery, Friel takes a more agnostic, political approach, as might be expected in the 1980s. The recurrence of this theme of redemption – and, in particular, the redemptive value of love – shows its reflection of the human condition and its universal prevalence.

Linking 3 texts
AO4
AO3

exfr.

Context
developed
↓
AO4
AO3

All three works were written at times of great social upheaval. *The Tempest* was written in 1611, when the English colonial project was a contemporary issue. England was moving from a dominant agrarian culture to becoming an important centre of trade. The Gunpowder Plot of 1605 increased tensions between the Catholic and Protestants, with its resulting social upheaval. *The Tempest* is set in a fictional, fantasy world which provides an allegory of contemporary England, with Prospero's island representing exotic, far-away lands and its diverse characters reflecting social conflict. The changes in England led to rapid development and expansion, and Shakespeare could be conveying his personal enthusiasm for this by showing the importance of moving on. In his personal life, too, he was moving on, as he stopped writing after this play – just as Prospero relinquishes his magical powers at the end of *The Tempest*.

Translations reflects events in the metamorphosis of Ireland from a rural, Gaelic society to an increasingly industrialised, modern colonial nation, also involving huge changes. In addition to this, the 1704 Penal Laws, as well as Daniel O'Connell's political views on the Repeal of the Union in 1823, would have resulted in bitter views of the English colonisation and Friel could also be suggesting the need to move on. This is also relevant at the time the play was first performed in 1980, as the IRA were extremely active and their ideologies were similar to the Irish in the 1830s, in

Cumulative word count: 502

Seems
understanding
& context

the way they believed in an independent Ireland. It was not just the IRA who were violently imposing their beliefs – Unionist Loyalists were involved in attacks, through the Ulster Defence Force, urging union with England, as exemplified through Maire's character. Friel's choice to set the play in 1833 conveys to a modern audience the relevance of the past to a modern issue. In his novel, Dostoevsky uses Raskolnikov to articulate his criticism of what he believed to be an increasing Westernisation of Russia, seen in the rise of nihilism and utilitarianism.

Friel uses the changesⁱⁿ and development of Hugh's character to illustrate the necessity of moving on. When he is first seen on stage, he is described as 'shabbily dressed' and '[having taken] a large quantity of drink', so we see him as a barely functioning man. This is supported by his language choice, as he announces his arrival with: 'Adsum, Doalty, Adsum.' The use of Latin, a dead language, to introduce himself highlights his involvement with the past as the language itself represents his backwards attitudes. Furthermore, there is an ironic contrast between his chosen language and what he is actually saying, as, although he is physically there, in mind and attitudes he is trapped in the past.

Friel
pt

Stagecraft helps in establishing the core of Hugh's character; he arrives carrying a stick, a hat and a coat. These objects represent Hugh's authority over the other characters, which is complemented as he 'hands them ... to Manus, as if he was a footman.' Friel is presenting an image of an authoritarian figure from a bygone age. Friel uses the appearance of the stage itself to convey the situation Hugh is in. The 'disused barn' being used for a hedge school symbolises their decline, due to the introduction of National Schools, offering the chance of an English education – Hugh is a part of something no longer required by contemporary society, symbolising the death of Irish culture. The character of Maire is used to challenge Hugh's values, which manifests itself in her demand to learn the English language: 'We should all be learning to speak English. That's what my mother says. That's what I say. That's what Daniel O'Connell said...' Here, Friel's use of anaphora as well as tripling shows Maire's control over language due to the persuasive techniques used which shows her intelligence and also how strongly she feels about this. The fact that Maire feels language is paramount in developing as a society shows the modern, dynamic thinking and could perhaps provide justification for the controversial place name changes. Hugh's complete dismissal of this by saying, 'We have been diverted – diverto – divertere – where were we?' shows his complete rejection of the need for change.

By Act 3 however, Friel has shown how Hugh's character has moved on. The use of the soliloquy, forming a bond between character and audience, allows Hugh's emotional and more human side to emerge. This newfound integrity is supported by the stage direction: 'He looks around the room carefully, as if he were about to leave it forever.' This creates a feeling of nostalgia, which is supported by his final remembrance of an old battle. Nesta Jones (i) suggests he is coming to terms with his past in order to face the present. A sense of confusion is also suggested by Jones which seems evident when Hugh confesses, 'I have no idea. But it's all we have. I have no idea at all.' Jones contrasts the arrogant, irascible old school-master he has become with the young poet, imbued with ideals to fight. Hugh recalls, 'We were

Cumulative word count: 1102

gods that morning, James', where the use of the first person and his friend's name create a sense of nostalgia and fond memories. He speaks of, 'The road to Sligo. A spring morning. 1978. Going into battle.' Friel uses many sentence fragments to show that Hugh is raking over old memories in his mind, with the rhythm and almost poetic language showing how dear these memories are to Hugh. He seems, though, to be preparing to move on and bid a final farewell to his youthful idealism of the 1798 rebellion, just as he is bidding farewell to his current rebellion against English influences. A02

The change he has undergone is explicitly shown by his changed attitude towards Maire, as he now concedes that '[he] will teach [her] English.' It appears Hugh has finally realised that there is a mutual benefit to modernisation and so offers his own skills to help achieve this. In contrast to his rapid questions and examination of the rote learning of his students in Act 1, Hugh realises now that, 'To remember everything is a form of madness.' Hugh has finally submitted to the fact that he needs to look forward, and remaining involved in the past is restricting, hence 'madness'. When *Translations* was first performed in 1980, Hugh's realisation that the best way to proceed is by communicating with the English would have sent out a strong anti-sectarian message for an Irish audience, as it was a time when sectarian violence was at a peak. A04

Whereas Hugh's intellectual revelation allows him to move on through compromise and acceptance of external realities, in *The Tempest*, Prospero's allows him to seek forgiveness of his enemies will set him free. Prospero's first act in the play is to cause a violent tempest to bring these enemies to him. This immediately shows him as a man obsessed with the wrongdoings of the past, and he is desperate for some sort of closure. The majority of Act 1, Sc. 2 is Prospero's relentless description of how he has been wronged, an important exposition for the audience, but also showing how he is imprisoned in the past – he cannot even talk to his daughter without feelings of bitterness. Shakespeare emphasises Prospero's distress through his use of language here: 'Of temporal royalties/ He thinks me now incapable; confederates –/So dry he was for sway – with' King of Naples.' The use of caesura throughout serves to break the syntax and so creates a juddering, rambling effect – re-enforced by phrases in parenthesis and an excessive use of exclamation marks and question marks, showing his great emotion. Critics accept that *The Tempest* is open to a "multiplicity of interpretive perspectives" (ii) – richly presented in this scene. In her responses, is Miranda the "traditional, guileless innocent" (iii), showing her deference in her short, respectful replies – "Sir, most heedfully;" or, rather, "conscious of playing a role, conscious of what her relation to her father requires her to say" (iv)? This latter interpretation would prepare the audience for her later outburst at Caliban – "abhorred slave!" – a speech otherwise so out of character that over the years directors keen to present the demure Miranda have had to attribute these lines to Prospero (v). A modern audience, or a more feminist actress, could perhaps detect humour – even a note of sarcasm – in places: "Your tale, sir, would cause deafness." A03
sustained discussion of various interpretations

In Act 4 Sc.1, he still shows animosity towards his enemies of the past, by instructing Ariel to 'Let them be hunted soundly.' The use of 'hunted' degrades his enemies to animals, and therefore shows his hatred and desire for vengeance due to his refusal to A02

Cumulative word count: 1687

leave the past. However, by Act 5 Sc. 1 the audience finally sees a change in his character, when Prospero says, 'The rarer action is/ In virtue than in vengeance' – a complete turnaround. Shakespeare is explaining how although it is hard to be virtuous, it is vital if any peace is to be obtained. The prolonged nature of the conversation between Prospero and Ariel, as well as the imagery and metaphors of cosmic events, and fantastical landscapes – 'By moonshine do the green sour ringlets make' – show both characters are undergoing a form of catharsis. In Prospero's case this causes him to retreat into a more naturalistic state, as opposed to his artificial, magical existence. The departure of Ariel prepares the audience for Prospero's subsequent soliloquy to reveal his inner feelings. His language is now peppered with images from nature, juxtaposed with his relinquished power; 'Bury it certain fathoms in the earth, / And deeper than did ever plummet sound/ I'll drown my book.' He is subduing his instruments of magic, literally deep within nature – magic's antithesis. The use of the imperatives 'bury' and 'drown', with their implication of death, reveals his desperation to cut short his magical practices. This is reflected in the structure of his soliloquy, where the use of regular iambic pentameter is cut dramatically short in the final half line. By doing this, Prospero is forgiving – with some difficulty – the perpetrators of past crimes against him.

In the character of Caliban we see the bitterness retained from Prospero's colonisation of the island – a possible lesson for the expanding Britain to learn. Prospero and Caliban immediately clash, shown by their foul language and exclamations. Prospero addresses Caliban as, 'Thou poisonous slave, got by the devil himself...' The use of 'slave' would be extremely offensive for Caliban as it is highlighting his unwillingness to serve Prospero, yet he has no choice due to his lack of magic skills. Both characters are obsessed with past battles and as a result there can be no personal connection between them. In much the same way as the IRA and UDA still celebrate past battles – for example the present day Orange Day marches commemorating the Battle of Boyne in 1690. Considering the recent Gunpowder Plot in 1605, an audience in 1611 could see Caliban as a laughable figure, possibly representative of Guy Fawkes, attempting to fight against a much greater power – the Protestant parliament. A modern audience, however, could instead see an oppressed minority, discriminated against by the ruling majority.

Dostoevsky also highlights the difficulty in forgiveness – specifically, the difficulty in forgiving oneself. He shows this mainly through Raskolnikov's eventual confession and his consequent peace of mind which is, 'the beginning of a new story, the story of the gradual rebirth of a man.' The use of 'rebirth' shows the relief and release achieved by forgiving oneself and suggests a person is renewed by forgiveness, as well as hinting at the cleansing effect of a Christian contrition. Dostoevsky underlines the great difficulty Raskolnikov experiences in coming to terms with his past by using the symbol of the cross which Sonya gives to him when he is going to turn himself in. Just as in the Bible story of Jesus carrying his cross to atone for the sins of humanity, Raskolnikov even falls to his knees on his journey. In this way, Solovyov claims "his boundless self-confidence must disappear in the face of what is greater than himself ... the higher justice of God". (vi)

All three writers offer a suggestion that blossoming love may unlock the past's hold

Cumulative word count: 2276

402 ✓ on the present. In *Translations*, Maire and Yolland's conflicting backgrounds mean they should not associate with each other, yet they find themselves irresistibly attracted. In Act 2, the audience see Yolland more and more assimilated into Irish culture, shown by his drinking of 'Potteen – beautiful' – a drink whose name he could not even pronounce correctly on his arrival. This connection with the Irish culture, and specifically Maire, culminates in a kiss between Yolland and Maire. Their language barrier shows the taboo of their love, as it is as if the two countries cannot speak to each other: 'Water? Water! Oh yes – water...' 'Water' has symbolic meaning, as geographically Ireland and England are separated by water, yet Maire speaking in English overcomes this separation – through their love they are freed from previous restrictions, just as water is cleansing and life-giving. Sarah, whose character represents the silenced voice of traditional Ireland, reacts to witnessing their kiss by 'Stand[ing] shocked, staring at them.' Her reaction here shows that this kiss would be a travesty to old-fashioned Ireland and so perhaps Friel is highlighting the need to move on and accept change. This would be controversial not only in 1833, but to a 1980s Irish audience, when still an Irish girl could be tarred and feathered for the 'crime' of fraternising with the British soldiers.

404 ✓ Shakespeare also uses the love of two apparently conflicting people as the catalyst for Prospero's eventual redemption. Amanda Mabillard is unconvinced of Prospero's sincerity in Act 5, arguing that he is able to forgive his enemies, "only after he has emerged triumphant and has seen [them] ... pay for their transgressions" (vii), in contrast to a genuine, unconditional Christian forgiveness. However, the roles of Miranda and Ferdinand would seem to suggest an alternative interpretation. As Prospero witnesses them fall in love, his faith in humanity seems to be restored. Unaware of his presence, Miranda and Ferdinand fall in love in a natural way, therefore making love itself seem natural and innocent, in contrast to the unnatural lust for revenge. Both are willing to serve – to them the past is not important; Miranda forgets that he is the son of her father's enemy and Ferdinand is not concerned with social norms, as he is willing to serve Miranda which would be unusual for a king. Miranda says, 'If you'll sit down/ I'll bear your logs the while...' to which Ferdinand replies, 'No, precious creature/ I had rather crack my sinews, break my back...' Mabillard seems to agree and to undermine her own lack of belief in Prospero's sincerity when she concedes that Shakespeare "crafts the union of Miranda and Ferdinand as a vehicle by which the two fathers can further their reconciliation" (viii). At the start of Prospero's change in Act 4 Sc. 1, following a discussion with Ferdinand about the nature of love, he states that he 'had forgot that foul conspiracy of Caliban and his confederates', showing love can help to alter his perspective. Prospero has been so resolute on revenge that even this brief lapse highlights a big change, which allows him to fully forgive his enemies. By Act 5 Sc. 1, he recommends to all that they '[Do] not burden our remembrances with/ A heaviness that's gone.' He finally sees his remembrances as a 'burden' and a 'heaviness' and thanks to his character development he can now finally release himself – through observation of young love he can relinquish his mission for revenge.

Just as Prospero forgives his enemies through his daughter's love for Ferdinand, Raskolnikov finds some salvation in his love for God which shows love is a powerful tool in redemption. Sonya serves as Raskolnikov's spiritual guide and almost as his

Cumulative word count: 2812

conscience, allowing him to confess his crime to her and thus reaches redemption. He is able to do this as Sonya shares the same feelings of alienation as him.

Both plays then, in common with the writing of Dostoevsky, explore the continuing impact of the past in our present day lives. Written five years after The Gunpowder Plot, *The Tempest* perhaps links to the alternating cycles of persecution by Catholics and Protestants in the 16th century – demonstrating both the need to forgive and the dangers of not doing so. Friel, too, points a way to modernisation, through the merging of cultures rather than the imposition of one over another. Dostoevsky presents forgiveness of self through religious salvation. So, while the past, indeed, exerts a strong power over the present, literature sets out to enlighten us to ways in which we can learn from it and, in so doing, transcend it.

effective
concluding sentences
linking texts together
Total word count: 2962 & taking
account of contexts
in which texts produced
& received

References

- (i) Jones, Nesta, 2000
- (ii) Kermode, Frank, 2000
- (iii) Mabillard, Amanda, 2000
- (iv) ibid
- (v) Introduction to *The Oxford Shakespeare. The Tempest*, 1987
- (vi) Vladimir Solovyov, quoted by McDuff 2002, *Shakespeareonline*
- (vii) Mabillard, Amanda, 2000
- (viii) ibid

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