

MODULE A – Textual Conversations

In this module, students explore the ways in which the comparative study of texts can reveal resonances and dissonances between and within texts. Students consider the ways that a reimagining or reframing of an aspect of a text might mirror, align or collide with the details of another text. In their textual studies, they also explore common or disparate issues, values, assumptions or perspectives and how these are depicted. By comparing two texts students understand how composers (authors, poets, playwrights, directors, designers and so on) are influenced by other texts, contexts and values, and how this shapes meaning.

Students identify, interpret, analyse and evaluate the textual features, conventions, contexts, values and purpose of two prescribed texts. As students engage with the texts they consider how their understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of both texts has been enhanced through the comparative study and how the personal, social, cultural and historical contextual knowledge that they bring to the texts influences their perspectives and shapes their own compositions.

By responding imaginatively, interpretively and critically students explore and evaluate individual and common textual features, concepts and values. They further develop skills in analysing the ways that various language concepts, for example motif, allusion and intertextuality, connect and distinguish texts and how innovating with language concepts, form and style can shape new meaning. They develop appropriate analytical and evaluative language required to compose informed, cohesive responses using appropriate terminology, grammar, syntax and structure.

Focus Questions

What is the text about?

What is the composer trying to convey?

Why is this composer trying to convey this idea?

How does this text comment on the other Text?

Does the text present an effective interpretation or reimagining of the older text?

Death of the Author

“Never again will a single story be told as though it is the only one.”

The Holy Sonnets and other Poems by John Donne (1572-1631) as well as the post-modern theatrical production “W;T” by Margaret Edson (1995) explore the enduring themes of the human

condition, such as the mortality of man, and the interpersonal bonds that define humanity. These themes manifest in a religious context through Donne's English Renaissance (1590 – 1710) due to the Calvinist beliefs of his time; such as life after death and an intrinsic potential for human bonds to be spiritual and transcend the physical. On the other hand, Edson's 20th century society has moved away from these beliefs and onto scientific data and nihilism, espousing instead post-modern literary movements such as Beckett, whom used absurdist performances to comment upon the ontological perspectives of human life. As such, through intertextual reading of both composers, a greater understanding of the way context shapes authorial purpose and meaning is achieved.

Donne Quote	Corresponding W;t Quote	Analysis
Resonances		
Relationships and Humanity (The Human Condition)		
<p>"Our two soules, therefore, which are one, though I must goe, endure not a breach, but an expansion, like gold to airy thinness beat"</p> <p>'A Valediction: Forbidden Mourning' uses an analogy of gold to capture the sanctity of the bond</p>	<p>"Now is not the time for verbal swordplay, now is the time for simplicity. Now is a time for kindness."</p> <p>"(Vivian unwraps the popsicle and breaks it in half)"</p>	<p>→ Feeling helpless and alone, she changes to no longer value literature over humanity.</p> <p>→ Donne suggests that even when hurt, love is malleable will remain intact and strong in its forces. This presents how the Jacobean community valued each other over objects, as human compassion was the true healer of solitude</p>
	<p>"I took your course in 17th century poetry..."</p> <p>"It look very good on my transcript... [that] I survived Bearing's Course."</p>	<p>→ Jason indicates modern superficiality of bonds based upon mutual benefit.</p> <p>→ Capitalisation of Research indicates that it is her name and that she has been dehumanised</p>

	“She’s Research!”	
<p>‘my physitions are growne cosmographers, and I their Mapp... that by them may be showne... per fretum febris by these streights to die.’</p> <p>“Hymne to God, my God, in my sicknesse,” includes the Map conceit. Donne too is read by his physicians.</p>	<p>“I feel right at home. It is just like a graduate seminar. With one important difference; in Grand Rounds, they read me like a book. Once I did the teaching, now I am taught.”</p> <p>There is irony that medical doctors are now doing to doctor Bearing what she so often did to a literal text.</p>	<p>→ With the best intentions, the physicians have reduced Donne’s body to a series of signs which they may read. The patient will die, but they wonder how- by which straight the soul will make its exit.</p> <p>→ Bearing’s medical team knows patients do not survive stage four metastatic ovarian cancer. They perform tests on her to see how long they can keep her alive- how many rounds of chemo can she withstand? What can they learn of her ‘febris’ as they chart her passage through it.”</p>
<p>“Thy firmness makes my circle just, and makes me end where I begunne.”</p> <p>“Stiff twin compasses are two.”</p>	<p>“Susie, you still are going to take care of me, aren’t you?”</p> <p>“I wanted her to come see me.”</p> <p>“I’m scared... I don’t feel sure of myself... Yes Please.”</p>	<p>→ Vivian’s suffering is evident through her vulnerability and her want for comfort from another human rather than poetry.</p> <p>→ Bearing inevitably ‘end where [she] begins,’ with the visit of EM Ashford. This is demonstrated through the use of stagecraft and body language in which Bearing craves the simple intimacy of</p>

	<p>“Are you going to be sorry when I – Do you ever miss people?”</p> <p>[leans over and kisses Vivian]</p>	<p>human contact. The motherly stage direction of Ashford, demonstrate that ultimately, human bonds remain enduring and inseparable.</p> <p>→ Donne explores the metaphysical synchronization of relationships accentuating how intrinsic bonds Transend temporal displacement. Support is intrinsic to the fulfilment of ones life.</p> <p>→ Donne draws upon the aesthetic elegance and axioms of mathematics and geometry in the 17th century to depict love and connection as beautiful and of self-evident truths.</p>
→ Anxiety in Faith and Salvation		
<p>“Oh God”</p> <p>“Teach mee how to repent”</p>	<p>“I’m scared. Oh God... I want to just curl up in a little ball.”</p>	<p>→ Bearing forsakes her self-sufficiency and tuns to God.</p> <p>→ Directly references God, pleading for acceptance.</p>
<p>“This is my play’s last scene... for thus I leave this world, the flesh and the devil.”</p> <p>Separation of soul from the body, flesh and</p>	<p>“She is naked and beautiful, reaching for the light.”</p> <p>Light suggests salvation, ascension.</p>	<p>→ Donne depicts his soul and body separating, but his soul merely leaving this world, not ending here also. There is no finality in death- he sees eternal life in the kingdom of God.</p>

<p>devil associated together as impurities left behind in ascension. Rejection of death as a finality.</p>	<p>“When your heart stops beating...” “Just let it stop.”</p> <p>Reaching implies she is eager and accepting of the movement. Stripping of physical/ mortal attachments to separate soul from body.</p>	<p>→ Bearing is able to reclaim her bare-self through redemption and acceptance of death. The redemption allows her to reclaim feminine attributes after those she lost to the cancer- spiritual movement and advancement. Like Donne, her rejection of death as a finality is shown by her empowerment in self chosen fate by signing the do not resuscitate.</p>
<p>“my pilgrimages last mile.”</p>	<p>“I look back, I see these scenes and I...”</p>	<p>→ Notion of a spiritual journey of two different natures that both include reflexivity.</p>
<p>“see the face whose feare already shakes my every joint.”</p>	<p>“maybe he’s scared so he hides behind his wit.”</p> <p>“the projection of the poem is cast directly upon her.”</p>	<p>→ Vivian parallels Donne’s anxiety portrayed in the poem</p> <p>→ Donne admits fear in judgment</p>
<p>“As if thou’had’st seal’d my pardon, with thy blood.”</p>	<p>The Run Away Bunny</p> <p>“See Vivian no matter where it hides God will find it.”</p> <p>The reading of, “The Run Away Bunny,” represents a circular return to an infantilised state,</p>	<p>→ The story’s optimistic assurances suggest that it is both impossible and unnecessary to hide from God, ideas that are echoed in Donne’s work</p> <p>→ Redemption in rejecting the intellectualism of Donne and desires simplicity, humanity and kindness shows her contrition.</p>

	denoting a return to innocence.	
→ Scholarship and Arrogance		
	<p>“The antineoplastic will affect some healthy cells.”</p> <p>“Antineoplastic, anti; against Neo; new, plastic: to mould. Shaping Antineoplastic, against new shaping.”</p>	<p>→ Donne hides behind his wit in order to mask apprehension about death- he is too proud to show his true feelings, however these can be deduced from the persona of his poems.</p> <p>→ Vivian uses her witty analysis of language to create a kind of emotional comfort and understanding to cope with the medical intrusion. She feels the necessity to retain her identity and distinction as a specialist in word analysis.</p>
<p>“Dull sublunary lovers love, whose soule is sense cannot admit absence.”</p> <p>“But we by a love so much refine’d... inter-assured of the mind.”</p> <p>In the love poetry, arrogance is shown through allusions to</p>	<p>“I can say quite confidently, No one is quite as good as I”</p> <p>“How I would perplex them!... I could be so powerful.”</p> <p>“I have made an immeasurable contribution to the discipline of English literature.”</p>	<p>→ Donne values spiritual love over physical, simple minds are being canonised for their love, elevating the status of Donnes love to that of religious significance</p> <p>→ Arrogance adds to the pathos of tragedy as it becomes lesser and lesser when Viviane loses her self.</p>

<p>spirituality highlighting the arrogance and superiority of the couple as their relationship exceeds physical connection.</p>		
	<p>“She gave a hell of a lecture. No notes, not a word out of place... It felt more like a boot camp.”</p> <p>“This guy John Donne was incredibly intense. Like your whole brain had to be in knots before you could get it.”</p>	<p>→ Jason refers to Vivian and John Donne as if they are of the same intellectual level, talking vividly about the both of them.</p>
<p>→ Intellectualising and Disempowering Morality</p>		
<p>“And Death shall be no more, Death, thou shalt die.”</p> <p>Satirically personifies Death as the ironic victim of his own fictional essence, undermining Death whilst elevating Donne’s religious doctrine.</p>	<p>“and Death, Capital D, shall be no more – semi colon!”</p> <p>Bearing purposely replaces the ‘comma’ for a ‘semi colon’, illustrating her initial belief that death is a mere finality.</p>	<p>→ In ‘Death Not Be Proud’, Donne presents death as a passage, transition, or movement into the afterlife, rather than a finality. He degrades and disempowers death within the poem, with the illusion of it being just a ‘comma’, or pause that will not last</p> <p>→ Bearing’s nihilist perspective of death is empathised within the deliberate intertextual allusions as she analyses the grammar in Donne’s line.</p>

<p>“My minutes last point.”</p> <p>This is My Playes Last Scence</p>	<p>“I find the image of ‘my minutes last point’ a little too... pointed”</p> <p>“I’ve got less than two hours then: curtain.”</p>	<p>→ John Donne and Vivian self-narrate their death in the same way, describing the time they have until their death metatheoretically/ breaking the fourth wall.</p> <p>→ Consciousness of own mortality.</p>
<p>“One short sleepe, wee wake eternally,”</p> <p>“Death, thou shalt die.”</p> <p>‘Death Be Not Proud’ uses imperative tone to address death</p>	<p>‘Bearing sees that that line doesn’t work. She shakes her head and exhales with resignation.’</p> <p>“Nothing but a breath- a comma- separates life from life everlasting.”</p> <p>Bearing uses Donne’s discourse with death to accept her fate in peace that it is not her entire end.</p> <p>“When your heart stops beating...”</p> <p>“Just let it stop.”</p>	<p>→ Bearing begins to transition within the play as she makes the realisation that she is not immortal and will die. Having gathered this new insight of life and death, her attitudes shift, and staging is used to admit that she was wrong and has misunderstood Donne’s poetry .</p> <p>→ shifting perspectives of death from the 17th century to the 20th. “Semi-colon’ represents an ultimatum, whilst ‘comma’ represents a continuation.</p> <p>→ Thus, for the impending death of Bearing, responders are given the choice to believe in the nihilist death of the “semicolon”, the oblivion, or the “comma”, that something continues after death.</p> <p>→ At the climax of the play, we see a shift in Bearing’s paradigm</p>

		towards Death as demonstrated through the use of stagecraft and body language, acknowledging a rejection of death as nihilistic.
'If serpents envious cannot be damned... why should I be?'	<p>"I know all about life and death, I am a scholar of Donne's Holy Sonnets which explore mortality in greater depth than any body of work in the English language"</p> <p>"I have a PH'D"</p>	<p>→ The rhetorical positioning of the persona at the absolute mercy of a higher power engages with the contextual belief of surrendering to God in order to be cleansed and forgiven. Donnes fear of damnation overcome by questioning of God's authority.</p> <p>→ Turns eternal damnation into an intellectual game</p> <p>→ Similarly Vivians ironic hyperbole established how theoretical comprehension of death within her intellectual view only has hindered her ability to receive mortality with emotion. She uses intellect to bring comfort and disempower death</p>
→ Contexts		
→ Religion (dissonances)		
<p>"oh God"</p> <p>Always in reference to Christian god of religious 17th century context</p>	<p>"oh God"</p> <p>Postmodernist technique of using the same word to represent different</p>	<p>→ Differences between the two texts is in the way they treat religion and God.</p> <p>→ For Donne, these are the central questions of a serious life; his whole culture supports the view</p>

<p>“Teach mee how to repent”</p> <p>“As if thou’had’st seal’d my pardon, with thy blood.”</p> <p>Directly references God, pleading for acceptance.</p>	<p>meanings through out the play.</p>	<p>that the aim of life is to attain salvation in heaven by conforming to the will of God on earth- he sees his own life as a part of the Christian Salvation story written in the bible.</p> <p>→ This view is no longer dominant in our culture. If a writer is to appeal to a modern secular audience they must seek new ways of talking about salvation and the spiritual realm.</p>
<p>17th Century Features</p>	<p>Post Modern Features</p> <p>“If I were writing this scene I would last a full 15 minutes, I would lie here and you would sit there.”</p>	<p>→ Metatheatrics where the play comments on itself and the audience is made aware of the theatrical experience they are a part of.</p>

Essay Questions

When exploring the conversation between texts, it is the disparities which are far more revealing and stimulating than the aspects they have in common. To what extent do you agree with this statement

- **The dissonances and resonances are of equal value– their presence heightens the relevance of some values different time contexts**
- **Emotional peak stimulated by dissonances moving to resonances- stimulating aspect**

P1 Dissonances

Resonances

“You can't compare one thing to another - you cant compare the sun and the moon. Each shine when it is their time.” Is this your understanding of the two texts you studies

- **Despite the contextual difference's texts share values but are modelled to alternate target audience. Both the sun and the moon dictate construct of life but occur at different times.**

How have the context and form of each text influenced your understanding of the connections between them?

- **Consideration of timeless thematic concerns naturally manifest in both contexts- understand their differences in presentation for contextual target audiences**

The poetry of John Donne (1572-1631) and Margaret Edson's post-modern theatrical production *W;t* (1995) explore the enduring themes of the human condition, such as the mortality of man and the interpersonal bonds that define humanity. These evidently timeless themes, however, manifest in the contexts of the author - Donne's poetry is heavily influenced by the Calvinist beliefs held throughout the English Renaissance; such as life after death and the intrinsic potential for human bonds to be spiritual and transcend the physical. Conversely, Edson's 20th Century society has drifted from these beliefs, choosing instead to find understanding in scientific data and nihilism. Each text's presentation of ideas is contextually manipulated to appeal to relevant target audiences.

PROSE POETRY- JOHN DONNE

ANALYTICAL RESPONSES

How does Donne convey experiences of the 17th Century Context?

In the works of metaphysical poet, John Donne (1572- 1631), contextual experiences are manifested through 17th Century relevant allusions and imagery. In an era of religious upheaval, superstition, exploration, scientific discovery, philosophy and romanticism, symbols of each

contextual matter are embedded within Donne's poetry, including The Apparition, and A Valediction; Forbidding Mourning.

The Apparition, Donne's poem from threatening voice of a scorned lover, dramatically presents time relevant ideas of superstition, science and religion. This begins from the title of the poem "apparition", which is successful in immediately evoking fear in a superstitious 17th century audience. This is due to timeless negative connotations of horror from the ghastly symbol. The allusion to the Elizabethan societies belief of the supernatural is furthered, "Then shall my ghost come to thy bed." This threat, intended to bring discomfort, is empowered by the receiver's contextual fear of the symbol of ghostliness and conveys influence of 17th Century experience. Ideas of relevant scientific experiences is captured in the line "Bath'd in a cold quicksilver sweat." Imagery of "Quicksilver sweat" aligns to the incorrect medical use of Mercury to cure illness and insanity. Here the image is used to convey threats of disease to the scorner, and through the use of early un-developed ideas of Mercury's medicinal qualities, is 17th Century concepts conveyed. Similarly, the context of prevalent religious influence is present in the exerts, "fain'd vestal," "thou shouldst painfully repent" and "wretch". "Fain'd vestal", has classical allusions to the vestal virgin priestesses of Roman temples and the sanctity of their purity. This image is used to criticise the woman's chastity; or inferred lack of purity. The command, "thou shouldst painfully repent," is an additional allusion to religious influence. The lexical choice of repent in a non-religious context shows religion's integral presence in all matters. Finally, the insult "wretch" has biblical connotations of sin, condemnation, yet and numerous other non-religious synonyms. This lexical choice and the prevalence of religious allusions in the poem conveys the magnitude of the Church's influence in the 17th century. Thus, The Apparition is an example of how John Donne conveyed experiences of his Elizabethan context of religion, scientific discovery and superstition through alluding to those ideas.

Similar ideas reappear in Donne's poem, A Valediction; Forbidding Mourning, as contextual motifs of spheres, exploration and alchemy appear. Alchemy and scientific discovery are alluded to through language connected to the refinery of rare elements. First appearing in the imagery of love as "refin'd", connection to the refinery of rare metals commences. This infers that love is as

pure and natural as the purest form of earthy metals after refinery. This imagery is continued when love is made to be “like gold to avery thinnesse beate.” The simile again likens love to the purest metal: gold, elevating the status of the love as it is linked to the precious gold band of a marital ring. The love is inferred to be infinitely expandable in the imagery of gold stamping; if their love is beaten, like gold it appears to become larger and still intact. Through these allusions to alchemy, the contextual scientific renaissance is honoured. The Elizabethan society’s awe for the perfection of spheres and circles is also present in the poem through mention of Anne Donne being the completion to John Donne’s circle of life. “Thy firmness makes my circle just,” refers to the satisfaction and wholesomeness of their relationship. This meaning indicates the time relevant belief of circles as an admired and eternal symbol of perfection and completeness. Finally, exploration is featured in the comparison of Donne’s love to a compass, guiding him home to safety. “As stifle twin compasses are two, thy soul the fix foot”, Donne conveys the experience of his travels and movement, as well as the importance of his relationship in guiding him through it. The conceit of a navigational tool a likened to love for its direction shows the contextual influence and prevalence of ideas of exploration during the 17th century. In A Valediction, Forbidding Mourning, John Donne is shown to convey experiences of his context through prevalence of focal ideas of the time including admiration for the sphere, alchemy and exploration.

Evident in both John Donne’s 17th Century poems, The Apparition, and A Valediction; Forbidding Mourning, experiences of his context is manifest in the poem as timely influences are captured in various descriptions. The contextual motifs of alchemy, religion, superstition, exploration and beliefs are alluded to in not only the two poems analyses, but each of Donne’s poems. Through this, the overarching values of the 17th century that contribute to Donne’s experience are conveyed.