

Annie John, the Postcolonial Palimpsest, and the Limits of Adaptation

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Abstract:

Revisions of canonical English literature are almost en vogue in what has become the postcolonial canon. William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, written in 1611, and Charlotte Brontë's 1847 *Jane Eyre* have been revised time and again in ways that give voice to the colonized subject. Two of the most popular adaptations of these works, Aime Césaire's 1969 *A Tempest* and Jean Rhys's 1966 *Wide Sargasso Sea*, adapt their source texts in a way that exposes colonial ideology by shifting narration to the colonized subject and location to the Caribbean. Jamaica Kincaid's 1985 *Annie John* further responds to this practice of Caribbean revisionism by signifying not only *The Tempest* and *Jane Eyre*, but also their most prominent postcolonial Caribbean adaptations. *Annie John* intertextually references Césaire, Rhys, and their source texts through layers of nuance. In *A Tempest*, Césaire explores contemporary race and colonial issues by pointing out these issues in a classic work of British literature. *Wide Sargasso Sea* demonstrates the sexism and fear of the Other implicated in the colonial gaze that *Jane Eyre* leaves unsaid. And in *Annie John*, Kincaid revises the masculinist ideology of *A Tempest* and racism of *Wide Sargasso Sea* but uses their own revisionist rhetorical strategies to do so. I argue that she particularly explores queer islander sexuality in a way that intertextually invokes a history of postcolonial Caribbean revisionism.

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