

# 1. Introduction

By reworking the themes, characters, and events of the texts they are based on, adaptations engage in a dialogue with their respective adapted texts. These adaptations explore different aspects of the adapted text by pushing them in a particular direction, examining them from a specific perspective, and adding new elements. Such reworkings can open up new readings and interpretations of the adapted text. Given the close relationship between an adaptation and the adapted text, it is critical not only to investigate how the two texts affect each other on a textual level but also to explore how their relationship may influence the reading process of either of the texts. In an adaptation, characters may be presented in a more sympathetic or problematic light than in the original. Shifts in narrative perspective from an adapted text to its adaptation can provide insights into the thoughts and emotions of characters, revealing possible motivations and intentions. Additionally, themes that only play a minor part in the adapted text can be brought to the foreground in the adaptation, encouraging a closer examination of the adapted text.

The purpose of this dissertation is to analyze and explore how these reworkings in adaptations can influence the reading process of the adapted work when readers engage with it after having read the adaptation. This dissertation expands on my master's and bachelor's theses and parts of this dissertation were taken from or are inspired by those works. I will analyze how a previous reading of Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* affects the reading process during a subsequent reading of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, as well as how reading Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* before reading William Shakespeare's *King Lear* affects the reading process of this play. The same process will also be used for Margaret Atwood's *Hag-Seed* and Marina Warner's *Indigo or, Mapping the Waters*, both adaptations of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The primary focus will be on the characters and themes of these texts, examining how their depictions, relationship dynamics, and other reworkings in the adaptations affect the perception

and interpretation of these characters and themes during a reading of the adapted texts. To explore how reading one of these adaptations influences the reading process of the adapted text, I will analyze the portrayal of characters and themes in the adaptation and discuss their relevance to the adapted text. Furthermore, I will outline how readers interpret and engage with the adapted text based on critical sources and explain how a previous reading of the adaptation may lead readers toward certain interpretations and readings over others.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jean Rhys provides a backstory for *Jane Eyre*'s Bertha Mason. The novel portrays her life as Antoinette, her original name in Rhys' narrative, before Rochester renames her Bertha. It explores her troubled childhood, her marriage to Rochester and ultimately her life confined in his home. By shifting the perspective to Antoinette, who is portrayed as a victim of unfortunate circumstances, Rhys illustrates Rochester's abusive and manipulative behavior. This perspective likely leaves a lasting impression on readers, influencing their subsequent interpretation of *Jane Eyre*.

Similarly, *A Thousand Acres* is narrated by Ginny, Smiley's equivalent of Goneril from Shakespeare's *King Lear* and the privileging of her perspective provides readers with deep insights into her thoughts and emotions as she struggles to deal with her father following the transfer of his farm. The family conflict familiar from *King Lear* is in this adaptation based on the father's long-term abuse of the two eldest daughters and the patriarchal ideology that justifies the abuse of women and land for the prosperity of the farm. These reworkings offer a different perspective on the events of *King Lear*, which may affect readers' views of Shakespeare's play.

*Hag-Seed* by Margaret Atwood adapts Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and follows Felix Phillips, a theater director who is betrayed and ousted by his assistant. Living in self-imposed exile, Felix seeks revenge by staging a unique version of *The Tempest* to win back his position. Atwood's adaptation adds the element of trauma as Felix is reeling from the losses of his wife and, more recently, his daughter Miranda. As Felix struggles to find

a way to take his revenge, an opportunity arises for him to teach literature as part of a literacy program in a prison. In many discussions during his class, *The Tempest*'s characters are presented from different perspectives, and with Felix as a representation of Prospero, *Hag-Seed* provides a unique version of the play's events, characters, and themes, which comes with interesting implications for the reading process of the adapted text.

Finally, *Indigo or, Mapping the Waters* by Marina Warner, which will be referred to as *Indigo* from now on, is also an adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* but focuses on different aspects of the play. Warner's adaptation is divided into two narrative strands. The first takes place in the seventeenth century on an island called Liamuiga and is mostly centered on Sycorax, while the second strand mainly follows the life of Miranda Everard in the twentieth century, a descendant of the colonizers who took over Liamuiga. These two strands emphasize the exploitation of colonial invasion and its long-term consequences, while bringing Sycorax, who is only spoken of in Shakespeare's play, to the foreground. These portrayals may influence how readers perceive the characters and the theme of colonialism during subsequent readings of *The Tempest*.

The theoretical framework for my approach is based on reader-response theory and adaptation theory. Regarding reader-response theory, I have mainly relied on Louise Rosenblatt's theory. According to Rosenblatt, reading is an individual experience, and the meaning of a text is created during the reading process when readers and texts come together ("Towards" 35). Furthermore, the reading process is influenced by readers' past literary experiences (Rosenblatt "*The Reader*" 81). This creates the basis for the argument that a previous reading of an adaptation can affect the reading process during a subsequent reading of the adapted text. Adaptation theory provides a background for understanding the dialogue between the adaptation and the adapted text and how the two texts engage with each other. I have mainly used Linda Hutcheon's and Julie Sanders' works on adaptation theory. The term "adaptation" is defined as "an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work" (Hutcheon 8). I also use Hutcheon's term "adapted text" to refer to the text the adaptation reworks (XV).

Based on how the adaptation engages with the adapted text, which themes are highlighted, and how they are portrayed, readers' perception of the adapted text can be influenced. During the reading of the adaptation, readers likely also develop expectations, preconceived notions, or attitudes pertaining to themes and characters, which can affect how they respond to these themes and characters in the adapted text.

A similar phenomenon can be seen in Gérard Genette's notion of the paratext. According to Genette, a work's paratext consists of all the accompanying productions by which a text turns into a book and assumes the form which is presented to the readers and the public (10). The paratext acts as a borderless threshold between the text on one side and the readers or the discourse surrounding the text on the other side (*ibid.*). Genette argues that this zone between the text and the non-text is a site of pragmatics and strategy, designed to influence public perception, whether well or poorly understood, to achieve a better reception and a more relevant reading, at least from the author's perspective (*ibid.*). He further explains that the paratext is made up of two components: the epitext and the peritext. The epitext includes the paratextual elements originally outside of the book, such as an author interview, while the peritext is made up of everything that is part of the book, such as the title or preface (12).

Regarding the possible influence of the paratext on the reading process, Genette provides an example involving readers of Proust. Those who have researched Proust's half-Jewish ancestry and homosexuality before reading his works are likely to interpret pages dealing with these topics differently than those who know nothing about him (15). The phenomenon I am analyzing, concerning the interactions between adaptations, adapted texts, and readers, can be understood in a similar light. Although adaptations generally cannot be considered as a paratext, since that would require the official approval of the author or at least the publisher of the adapted text, they can still impact how readers engage with the adapted text. Adaptations can provide additional contexts for or commentary on the adapted text, much like an author might during an interview or a documentary on their text.

Thus, it is reasonable to assume that adaptations can have similar effects on the reading process as those laid out by Genette about the paratext.

To support my analysis, I have relied on Michael Thorpe's article "'The Other Side': Wide Sargasso Sea and Jane Eyre" and Bożena Kucała's "*Wide Sargasso Sea: 'There Is Always the Other Side'*" which investigate how Rhys' adaptation engages with its adapted text. John G. Peters' article on marginalization through labeling is particularly relevant given the manipulative tactics Rochester employs in Rhys' novel, which may alert readers to consider the issues Peters discusses during a subsequent reading of *Jane Eyre*. Regarding *A Thousand Acres* and *King Lear*, Anna Lindhé's article "Interpersonal Complications and Intertextual Relations: *A Thousand Acres* and *King Lear*" provides insights into the relationships between the characters in Smiley's novel and Shakespeare's play, and how that affects readers' interpretations of both texts. Judd Arnold's article also provides valuable insights on how to judge *King Lear* and how readers might respond to different aspects of the play. Finally, Lynda E. Boose and Coppélia Kahn both analyze the theme of incest in *King Lear*, which is particularly relevant given the incestuous abuse at the core of Smiley's novel.

Stephen Orgel's introduction to *The Tempest* covers a variety of the play's facets and provides a reliable starting point for any analysis of this play. Similarly, when it comes to colonialism and the relationship between Caliban and Prospero in *The Tempest*, Peter Hulme's *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean* is highly insightful. Regarding colonialism in *The Tempest*, Benjamin Hilb's article "In Defense of Caliban: *The Tempest* and the Myth of the Black Rapist" has also been particularly thought-provoking because Hilb challenges a variety of readings by other critics pertaining to Caliban's apparent rape attempt. Cao Li's and Rebecca Weaver-Hightower's articles on Marina Warner's *Indigo* offer astute analyses of Miranda and colonialism in this adaptation. Finally, I want to highlight Paul Joseph Zajac's article "Prisoners of Shakespeare: Trauma and Adaptation in Atwood's *Hag-Seed*", which aids in understanding Felix, particularly regarding the themes of trauma and revenge.

I will begin by laying out the most relevant aspects of reader-response theory and adaptation theory as the basis for my analysis and explain why a previous reading of an adaptation can influence a subsequent reading of the adapted text. Next, I will analyze Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, specifically focusing on elements of the character that are likely to influence a subsequent reading of *Jane Eyre*. This will be followed by an analysis of Bertha in Brontë's novel, exploring possible readings based on critical sources and illustrating how a previous reading of Rhys' novel may influence readers towards certain readings. The same process is then also applied to Rochester in both texts. Moreover, I will also investigate the parallels that *Wide Sargasso Sea* establishes between Antoinette and Jane in *Jane Eyre*, examining how this affects reader's interpretations of both Jane and Bertha in Brontë's novel. Finally, I will analyze how themes of patriarchy and colonialism underlie the events in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, informing characters' behaviors and thoughts, and show how the displays of these themes might affect readers' perceptions these themes in Brontë's text.

Regarding *A Thousand Acres* and *King Lear*, I will follow a similar analytical process, examining how Ginny and Rose are displayed in Smiley's novel, how Goneril and Regan are portrayed in relation to Smiley's characters, and how that may affect the reading process. This process will then be used to analyze Larry and Lear, as well as Caroline and Cordelia. I will also investigate how patriarchy as a theme underpins the actions and motivations of Smiley's characters, demonstrating how multiple facets of a patriarchal ideology are represented by different characters before looking at the theme of patriarchy in *King Lear* and analyzing how the depiction in *A Thousand Acres* may influence readers' understanding of patriarchy as a theme in Shakespeare's play. Similarly, I will assess how the depictions of Felix and Miranda in *Hag-Seed* may influence the reading process of Prospero and Miranda in *The Tempest*, as well as how the portrayal of revenge may influence readers' perception of this theme in Shakespeare's play. Finally, I will also investigate how the display of Miranda as well as

the presentation of colonialism in *Indigo* can impact the reading process of these elements in *The Tempest*.

At the end, I will discuss some of the general implications of how adaptations can affect the reading process of the adapted texts which can be derived from my analysis. This involves examining the design factors of the adaptations that may increase the likelihood of their impact on the reading experience of the adapted works, as well as acknowledging the limitations of this effect. Furthermore, I will also touch on reader-related factors that can influence the extent of the effect on the reading process. Jasper Fforde's *The Eyre Affair* and Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* serve as additional examples to explain the aforementioned factors. The goal of this discussion is to establish a general understanding of the interactions between the readers, adaptations, and adapted texts, along with the factors that influence these interactions.



## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Reader-Response Theory

Before moving on to the main part of this thesis, I will outline and explain the theoretical framework that forms the basis of my approach. The following analysis is primarily based on two literary theories: reader-response theory and adaptation theory. I will begin by explaining the fundamentals of reader-response theory, then specifically look at Rosenblatt's theory as the primary source for this theoretical background, and finally discuss why reader-response theory and the reading process provide an interesting angle to analyze adaptations and adapted works from.

There is more to the reading process than translating the written signs on a piece of paper or screen into meaning. Literary scholars have been intensely debating what the reading process entails, which factors play into it, and how they affect the process. For a long time, the reader was seen as a "passive recipient ... of the impact of the work" (Rosenblatt "*The Reader*" 4). Attention was mainly focused either on the text, which was seen as a mirror of reality containing an absolute meaning that left little room for diverging interpretations, different perspectives, or readings against the grain, or focus was put on the author and how details of the author's personal life, their motives for writing, and their presumed attitudes toward the themes and characters within the text may hint at certain interpretations (1–2). More contemporary views on the reading process, however, see the reader tasked with a more active role during the reading process and the text's meaning as fluid and open to different perspectives. Renate Brosch explains succinctly:

It has become a truism that the reader is not a passive recipient, but an active producer of meaning, and the concept of the text has undergone an analogous transformation, being no longer regarded as a finite object with determinate meaning, but as an unstable entity under constant (re)construction. (7)

The text and the reader, thus, come together on an individual basis, leading to unique readings and interpretations based on a variety of factors concerning the individual reader. Individual words can translate to different visualizations, and how a description comes to life in the imagination of a reader is different between each reader. Similarly, readers have a lot of opportunities to become active in cases of linguistic ambiguities and gaps within the text. These gaps are necessary for the different segments of a text to be connected into a coherent image within the reader's mind, and the filling in of these gaps is needed to complete the text (Iser "*Der Akt*" 284). The text is merely posing a framework constructed out of what is explicitly written in it and leaves room for the reader's imagination to become active (176). Of course, there is also the possibility of reading against the grain by scrutinizing the main narrative and common interpretations or analyzing marginalized, silenced, or suppressed narratives and reading positions (Brosch 10).

Expectation, anticipation, and retrospection further influence the reading process and "the formation of the virtual dimension, which in turn transforms the text into an experience for the reader" (Iser "The Reading" 286). These three aspects also lead to different results for each individual reader, as expectations and anticipations are based on readers' personal experiences from both real life and past readings. Retrospection, in turn, is based on these expectations and anticipations (287). "The text provokes certain expectations which in turn we project onto the text in such a way that we reduce the polysemantic possibilities to a single interpretation" and thus create a unique reading of a text (290), the meaning of which becomes realized in the mind of an individual reader. During the reading process, these expectations are constantly under revision, and their confirmation or disconfirmation affects the evaluation of previous text passages as well as the passages that are currently being read. Confirmation or disconfirmation of expectations may lead to the formation of attitudes or cause the reader to question certain aspects of the text, such as, the reliability of the narrator.

There are a variety of reader-response theories considering the contribution of the reader in the act of reading on a spectrum of seeing readers

as the most influential factor on one end, or as barely having any influence on the other end. Theories that examine the reading process from a psychoanalytical perspective tend to “emphasize the reader’s personality” so highly, “that the text becomes practically passive” (Rosenblatt “Viewpoints” 103). On the other end of the spectrum are theories like Iser’s, which view the text’s meaning as mostly complete and stable and “see the reader’s contribution only as filling in ‘the gaps’” (ibid.). For the purposes of this thesis, I will rely on Rosenblatt’s transactional reader-response theory, which sits in the middle of the spectrum and gives equal amounts of credit to both the reader and the text in the creation of meaning during the reading process.

Rosenblatt describes the general reading process as follows: the writer attempts to convey certain concepts, experiences, and images “through the medium of words” to the reader, who then determines what that text communicates to them by working out the “special meanings” and “submerged associations that these words and images have for the individual reader” (“*Literature*” 37), which leads to a unique experience. She uses the term “transaction” and not interaction, describing what is happening when a reader and a text come together “to designate a relationship in which each element, instead of being fixed and predefined, conditions and is conditioned by the other” (Rosenblatt “The Transactional” 380). This means that the text influences the reader just as much as the reader influences the text and that the reading process is a “total situation” in which the text and reader act in unison instead of being two separate forces acting on one another (Rosenblatt “Viewpoints” 98).

Over the course of the reading process, readers are also “developing and attending to attitudes, a sense of the tone and character of the narrative” and its characters (Rosenblatt “*The Reader*” 38), which affect the evaluative processes of a subsequent reading. Readers bring to a reading a variety of factors and influences that shape the literary experience. The reader brings to or adds to the reading “his whole past experience of life and literature. His memories, his present preoccupations, his sense of values, his aspirations, enter into a relationship with the text” (81). Cultural assump-

tions and the knowledge of literary conventions, for example concerning genres, are also called upon during the reading process (88). Rosenblatt further explains that “possession of knowledge or insight – historical, psychological, political, for example – may yield special angles of vision or powerful organizing frameworks” that are called upon during the reading process (147). These factors affect what readers anticipate or expect, what they pay attention to, and whether they act as a “trusting listener who hears what is being set forth as neutral” or whether they listen for “ironic overtones” and read against the grain (57).

All of these contributing factors make each reading a unique experience because there are too many factors that would need to line up in the same way in order to lead to an identical reading. For example, someone who has a lot of experience with Shakespeare’s plays will have a different experience reading one that is new to them compared to someone encountering their first Shakespeare play. If they are frequently watching theater productions, they will visualize the play differently than someone who has never been to one. Someone who is looking at a play from a feminist perspective will experience it in a different manner than someone who is analyzing it from a historical perspective. These are just some examples of the various kinds of experiences that can be produced by reading the same text. I will use these factors as a starting point for my analysis by focusing on the specific case of adaptations as previous literary experiences and show how this may affect the reading process of my selected texts.

I argue that adaptations present an interesting case from the perspective of reader-response theory since they are closely related to the text they adapt. I suggest that this close relationship between the texts causes an effect when reading one of the texts before the other and that having read either the adaptation or the adapted work before the other may affect the reading process of the second text. As I have laid out in the section above, reader-response theory acknowledges that readers bring to any literary reading their past experiences of literature. This pertains especially to expectations a reader has about a novel compared to a poem or satire based on their past experiences with different types of texts and genres (90).