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The Emergence of Voice and Identity in the Context of the Neocolonial Experience: The Writings of Jamaica Kincaid

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THE EMERGENCE OF VOICE AND IDENTITY IN THE
CONTEXT OF THE NEOCOLONIAL EXPERIENCE:
THE WRITINGS OF JAMAICA KINCAID

by

Kirstin Ruth Bratt

B.A., Saint Olaf College, 1990

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of

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in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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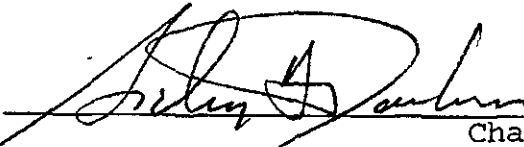
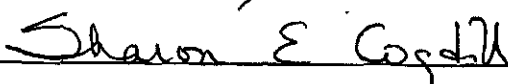
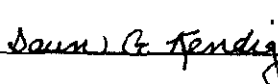
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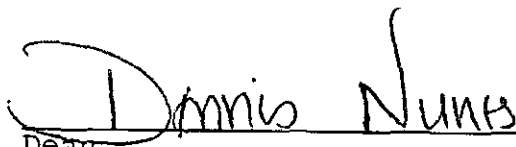
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This thesis submitted by Kirstin Ruth Bratt in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts at St. Cloud State University is hereby approved by the final evaluation committee.


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THE EMERGENCE OF VOICE AND IDENTITY IN THE
CONTEXT OF THE NEOCOLONIAL EXPERIENCE:
THE WRITINGS OF JAMAICA KINCAID

Kirstin Ruth Bratt

Jamaica Kincaid's novels Annie John and Lucy demonstrate a marked resistance to Western philosophy and the British literary canon. The writings of Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Patricia Hill Collins provide useful frameworks for viewing Kincaid's work. Ngugi's metaphor of "moving the centre," combined with Hill Collins' theories of Black feminism are both useful in examining the issues of voice and identity in the neo-colonial experience.

Critics have attempted to identify Kincaid's work as either coming-of-age, pre-oedipal narrative, feminist, or autobiographical. While these categories can also be useful in reading Kincaid's work, they are also limited in their ability to define her writings. Generally Kincaid's work eludes such attempts at definition.

Kincaid's rhetorical style creates a multiplicity of layers. She reveals the deception inherent to colonialism by using an unreliable narrator; she also establishes an environment in which time and space are unified and circular. Her rhetorical methods recall the many layers of the colonial context of Antigua.

Kincaid's work is radically feminist in that it dismantles existing theories of feminism. Kincaid's practical view of feminism combines thought and action, mocking the Western feminist tradition of relying on texts and theories. Kincaid's frame for viewing Western feminism (the "outsider-within" as defined by Hill Collins) allows her, as it does other marginalized women, to comment upon Western feminism from an informed but critical stance.

Lucy and Annie John, both young women of Antigua, hold low expectations and opinions of the male characters. The male voices in Kincaid's work speak with impotent and ineffective voices in contrast to the women who have tremendous power on many levels of communication.

Kincaid's female narrators develop close relationships with other women. Through these relationships, which closely parallel the women's connection to the land, women cultivate kinship communities in which their individual voices receive respect.

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Month Year

Approved by Research Committee:

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Dedicated to the beautiful Sha-Narah Ruth, my inspiration and hope. And the beautiful Pauline Ruth, my advocate and friend.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Two of Jamaica Kincaid's major works, Annie John and Lucy, highlight distinct aspects of a young woman's emergent identity and its connection to her strengthening voice. The main characters in these works demonstrate a path of development in which they evolve from colonized victims to resistant, resilient women opposing colonial oppression. Kincaid encourages her Western audience to look at her work from the view of a colonized subject.

The metaphor of "moving the centre," which is introduced by postcolonial theorist Ngugi wa Thiong'o in Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms, is useful for examining Kincaid's writings. According to Ngugi, people from colonized nations become marginalized in academia because their work is always viewed for its relationship to British literature rather than for its relationship to its own history and culture. Ngugi challenges academics and critics to study literature for its intrinsic value and to examine its place in the historical and social context of its original location. The metaphor helps reveal meaning for Kincaid's work because she moves the center in various

ways: shifting perspectives, reflecting Black feminist epistemology, generating ambiguity through unreliable narrators, and uniting binary oppositions such as time and space.

While postcolonial writings such as Kincaid's ask readers to move the center, or develop a new frame of reference, many critics and readers have not risen to meet this challenge. According to Chinua Achebe in his article "Colonialist Criticism," traditional Western literary theories are not adequate to assess postcolonial writings because they view literature for its relationship to British tradition rather than on its own merits. Rather than assist scholars in examining literature, these categories tend to subjugate postcolonial literatures.

Kincaid's work has suffered this form of colonialism or subjugation because critics insist on categorizing her work within the limiting frames of Western literary criticism. Even though Kincaid herself says that she does not like to be placed in any particular school of thought, critics insist on categorizing her work within traditional literary theories. However by resisting the canon, Kincaid exercises her ability to "move the center" and generally succeeds in eluding the conventional definitions.

An analysis of Kincaid's work also benefits from the theories of Patricia Hill Collins in Black Feminist Thought. Kincaid's narrators demonstrate an epistemology which is

remarkably similar to that outlined by Hill Collins. As a Black feminist, Kincaid creates characters whose epistemologies reject the traditional dichotomies of Western philosophy, concentrating instead on the union of thought, knowledge, and activism.

Both theorists, Ngugi and Hill Collins, provide useful frameworks for viewing Kincaid's ability to create identity and voice within the neo-colonial experience. Kincaid moves the center by forcing a shift in perspective, and she engages in Black feminist thought by combining thought and action in her work.

Kincaid moves the center also by resisting conventional rhetoric. Kincaid creates an unreliable narrator and uses a cyclical view of time and space. Such rhetorical methods create a shifting of perspective, so that "moving the centre" is accomplished not only in the content and language of the writing, but also in the form and technique.

Kincaid uses the power of language and voice in creating characters, and her characters use language and voice to gain strength. The voice of the main character becomes more clearly defined in each of Kincaid's books. In Annie John, the protagonist is a young woman whose grows from silent spectator to vocal young woman. In the beginning of the novel, she silently watches events. She attends funerals, quietly listening to the wail of the mourners; she watches her mother prepare meals and take care of household chores.

Indeed, the first time Annie John speaks is when she is called upon to read a story for her class in the third chapter.

The story is a woman's entrance to the world through language, as she struggles to find her voice. She tests her voice, falling out of favor with her mother in the process, throughout the book. In the final chapters, she becomes sick and begins to view words through her delirium as tangible objects which float around the room and which she attempts to claim as her own. In the final chapter she finally claims her identity through these words. She says,

'My name is Annie John.' These were the first words that came into my mind as I woke up on the morning of the last day I spent in Antigua, and they stayed there, lined up one behind the other, marching up and down, for I don't know how long (130).

For Annie John, the struggle to gain words, language, and voice is directly related to her emerging identity. She uses her newly-found voice to speak her name, thereby creating and defining her identity.

In Lucy, the main protagonist engages in a similar process of growth as she attempts to define herself through language. As she discovers the disparities between herself and her white employers, her words become a mechanism for expressing her anger. She begins to engage in Black feminist thought, which means that as she gains knowledge, she finds it necessary to act. Her words become a source

of tension between Lucy and her white employer Mariah, but her emerging voice cannot be silenced.

Kincaid's work demonstrates that the creation of identity in the colonial context differs from the question of identity posed by the Western tradition. The development of identity described by Kincaid contrasts with the Western tradition which glorifies the "rugged individual" and privileges independence. For Kincaid, and others who have suffered the loss of language, home, and culture because of colonization, creation of identity becomes a reclamation of the past. It is a process of restoring that which has been lost or stolen.

The creation of identity in Kincaid's literature is precipitated by the strengthening of the voice; it includes the rebuilding of one's community and an identification with one's home and family. In creating identity, Kincaid's characters find themselves in conflict between the need for independence and the security of dependence. As a metaphor for the colonial condition, these main characters waver between hatred and love for their mothers and for their home.

Annie John

One of the main themes in Kincaid's second book Annie John is that of a young girl struggling to separate from symbiotic unity with her mother, yet still maintain her identity as part of the community. As described by Roni

Natov in "Mothers and Daughters: Jamaica Kincaid's Preoedipal Narrative," Annie John explores the mother-daughter bond through the context of Antigua's political, familial, and social realities..

In addition, Annie John criticizes British culture, challenging various representations of imperialism. Kincaid creates a paradigm in which Black women and Black feminist philosophy is the standard, so that everyone who is not Black and female is singled out as peculiar. Annie John concerns the story of a young girl growing up and claiming an identity through the development of her voice. Her silence is a metonymy for colonial oppression which has silenced many of its victims. The emergence of her identity and voice becomes complicated by the experience of colonial oppression. Subsequent chapters will explore the way Annie John uses her voice to gain strength and resist oppression.

Lucy

Kincaid's most recent book, Lucy, begins where Annie John ends. While Annie John leaves her family to become an au pair in England, Lucy opens with a young woman's arrival in New York to become an au pair. Lucy's voice also begins softly, as Lucy observes her new surroundings, but gains strength as she begins to act against injustice. The book reveals many insights about the inability of even liberal white Americans to "move the center" and realize their complicity in oppression. Lucy often speaks out against

oppression, effectively challenging the assumptions of the European hegemonic tradition represented by the white employers.

In many ways, Lucy is a culmination of Kincaid's previous books. The main character continues the process begun by Annie John of demystifying all the characters previously regarded as authorities, or even deities. In addition to revealing the inner workings of the other characters, Lucy sets to work dismantling the Western philosophies of feminism, environmentalism, capitalism, and interpersonal relationships. In the following chapters I will discuss the growth of Lucy's voice and the similarities between Lucy's feminism and that outlined by Patricia Hill Collins in Black Feminist Thought.

Chapter II

FRAMEWORKS FOR VIEWING KINCAID'S LITERATURE

Kincaid's writings work on many levels to expose the destruction caused by colonialism and to discuss the difficulties that marginalized people face when attempting to voice their resistance to colonization. Perhaps the most devastating effect of colonization is the loss of culture and language. In the postcolonial environment, an individual's identity becomes a mixture of both the dominant and the subjugated culture. Creating one's identity becomes a balancing act, in which a person attempts to discover herself through her connection to the land, yet rejects those destructive elements which have taken hold as a result of colonization.

In Kincaid's writings, both Annie John and Lucy demonstrate an ambivalence toward their mothers and toward their homeland of Antigua, sometimes embracing, sometimes rejecting. They long for separation, yet fear displacement. Annie John fears losing her mother's love, yet she arranges a physical separation by taking a job in England. Lucy refuses to write to her mother, yet is often overwhelmed by homesickness.

Two theorists, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Patricia Hill Collins, provide useful frameworks for evaluating Kincaid's writings. Both theorists write from the perspective of colonized subject, which is important in such an analysis. Because they have personally experienced marginalization, these theorists are more capable of examining the effects of colonization and oppression. As Hill Collins herself explains, marginalized people, or outsiders-within, witness the oppressor from the oppressor's point of view because they are constantly in contact with it through the institutions which the dominant culture controls. Outsiders-within are more skillful and proficient at perceiving both sides of an issue.

The theories used in this analysis, those of Hill Collins and Ngugi, are generated out of the experience of colonization. Ngugi's metaphor of "moving the centre" is useful because it helps readers visualize literary criticism and history as emanating from one central reference point, Western culture, and highlights the need for a multiplicity of centers. Hill Collins' Black Feminist Thought emphasizes Kincaid's conceptual stance as "outsider-within." It also creates a distinction between the feminism created out of the European hegemony and the feminism practiced by Kincaid, which stresses the need for transformative knowledge combined with action.

Postcolonial Theories

Postcolonial theories provide a useful framework for viewing Kincaid's texts. Her writings clearly emerge from the colonial experience, and the definitions offered by postcolonial theorists do seem appropriate for Kincaid's work. However, the postcolonial theories offered by these theorists ultimately fail to completely account for Kincaid's work.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, in his collection of essays entitled, Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms, explains that the process of colonization includes the destruction of language, literature, and cultures. He says that Europe has controlled the educational systems of colonized nations, so that the humanities curriculum consists of "the humanity contained in the canonised tradition of European critical and imaginative literature, and, further, confined within the linguistic boundaries of each of the colonizing nations." The cultural hegemony perpetuated by such a system not only allows Europeans to consider themselves the center of the universe, but also encourages the students in colonized nations to view Europe as superior. Ngugi explains:

The imperialist cultural tradition in its colonial form was meant to undermine peoples' belief in themselves and make them look up to the European cultures, languages and the arts, for a measurement of themselves and their abilities. It was meant to undermine their belief in their capacity to struggle successfully for control of their whole social and natural environment. (44)

When colonized people suffer the loss of language and culture, the pain of such a loss resonates through their arts and literature.

Kincaid's voice resounds powerfully against cultural hegemony. Her writings are calculated to decimate the Western philosophy imposed on her by the British. Kincaid herself is quoted by Audrey Edwards as saying that "she writes to save her life--that if she couldn't write, she would be one of those people who throw bombs, who spout revolution, who would surely be in jail or perhaps even dead, or maybe just insane." Writing for Kincaid is an act of resistance to colonial rule in which she challenges British standards of behavior.

Kincaid's works also reflect the characteristics of postcolonial writing outlined by Australian theorists Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin in their landmark book, The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures. Since its publication in 1989, this book has been influential in the field of postcolonial studies as one of the first theoretical attempts to categorize the field of postcolonial studies as an academic discipline.

Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin define as postcolonial those literatures which

emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre. (2)

Kincaid's work fits the definition offered by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin because the writings emerge from the experience of colonization, emphasize the colonial experience, and foreground the tension between Antigua and England. Kincaid makes frequent references to the British influence on Kincaid's Caribbean island home of Antigua. She mentions the British influence in terms of literature, teachers, missionaries, holidays, cultural traditions, and imported products.

In emphasizing her difference from the colonial "centre" Kincaid often contrasts Western philosophy with her own. As Giovanni Covi writes in his article, "Jamaica Kincaid and the Resistance to Canons,"

Jamaica Kincaid's [books] represent examples of writing that break through the objective, metaphysical linearity of the tradition.... Her voice manages to speak up for her specificity without ... reproducing in the negative the modes of classical white patriarchal tradition. (345)

Kincaid's work marks its distinction from the colonial center by resisting Western philosophy. Helen Tiffin's article, "Cold Hearts and (Foreign) Tongues," claims that colonialist education destroys African-Caribbean traditions by introducing the idea of separation between mind and body (910). She writes, "Afro-Caribbean traditions of dance, story-telling, carnival did not seek disembodiment, either in terms of manner or matter" (915). The theories of Black feminist thought as outlined by Patricia Hill Collins also

reject the dichotomy of mind and body, claiming instead that we cannot separate our thoughts from our actions.

In Annie John the young Annie attends a British school in Antigua. But as Helen Tiffin notes, even a child as young as Annie is capable of resisting British rule. Tiffin states,

The internalisation of the European text ... is refigured and disrupted in Annie John through images of girls in classrooms letting their attention wander from the Anglo-script to sexuality and the body, to female companions and the local boys. Annie and her friends sit on the tombstones of the white planters as they compare and admire their developing breasts. (912)

Kincaid's Annie John further resists colonialism by demonstrating an aversion to Columbus. Although the British educational system taught her to consider Columbus a hero and savior, the young Annie immediately detested him. Annie delights in the knowledge that Columbus was sent in chains back to Europe. Tiffin writes of Annie's pleasure "not just at the reversal of Columbus' fortunes as he is taken back to Europe in chains, but at his strategic disembodiment, his temporary leglessness" (912). Kincaid's young characters, Annie John and Lucy, do not have the language to express their anger toward the colonizer, but they have an innate sense of the injustice done to them. As their voices gain power, they begin to articulate their anger about these inequities.

Kincaid also describes the schism between the European "heroes" described by British texts and the Europeans with

whom she is personally acquainted. In A Small Place, she explains: "We felt superior to all these people; we thought perhaps the English among them who behaved this way weren't English at all, for the English were supposed to be civilized" (30). Kincaid always distinguishes between her people, the Antiguan, and the British who participated in and benefitted from colonization.

In contrast to social theorists who insist that behavioral responses are universal or who posit that anyone is capable of becoming an oppressor, Kincaid claims that Antiguan philosophy would not allow them to behave as the colonizers do. Through Annie John's voice, Kincaid writes,

we, the descendants of the slaves, knew quite well what had really happened, and I was sure that if our ancestors had gone from Africa to Europe and come upon the people living there, they would have taken a proper interest in the Europeans on first seeing them, and said, 'How nice,' and then gone home to tell their friends about it. (76)

According to Kincaid's assessment, the British were different from her people, because the philosophy of her people was non-oppressive. Ngugi agrees with this when he states that imperialism occurred as a result of the European philosophical discourse which placed Europe in the center of the universe (11-12).

Ngugi goes on to state, however, that the result of imperialist expansion is the destabilization of the imperialist nations. Because imagination and creative subversion are natural results of oppression, the stability

of the empire is always under threat (12).. Ngugi explains that even though colonization has been effective in keeping colonized subjects from realizing their potential, a culture of resistance thrives in any colonized country through songs, dances, poetry, and drama. He writes that these sites of resistance reflect "people's real needs as they struggled against appalling working conditions ... or which sang of their hopes as they took up arms against colonial oppression" (45). Ngugi asserts that the only way to destroy a culture is to destroy its people, and that movement against oppression will always exist.

Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin agree that the colonial environment is one which produces enormous creativity. They claim that oppression provides fertile ground for the imagination. They write of Guyanese novelist and critic Wilson Harris:

Harris sees imaginative escape as the ancient and only refuge of oppressed peoples, but the imagination also offers possibilities of escape from the politics of dominance and subservience. (35)

Harris provides a metaphor for the imagination of colonized subjects using the Middle Passage--that stretch of ocean through which African peoples were brutally forced to travel from Africa to the Americas as slaves. He writes that the contemporary version of the Middle Passage is a narrow psychic space through which radical transformation

occurs (35). By passing through this psychic space, marginalized people gain strength to resist the dominant culture.

Much is lost by crossing the Middle Passage. For colonized people, the loss of language, culture, history, health, resources is devastating. However, once colonial subjects become proficient in using the tools of the colonizer, they are often able to force changes. For example the literature created by colonized subjects is usually incorporated within the canon in an effort to maintain control. Consequently the traditional canon of literature becomes an ever-widening center which is forced to expand (Ashcroft 4).

The discourse created from marginalized people powerfully resists and threatens the dominant culture. Kincaid's work fits the definitions offered by postcolonial theorists who agree that postcolonial writing must emerge out of the postcolonial experience, must foreground the tension with the colonial power, and must emphasize the difference from the assumptions of the imperial center.

However, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin define two types of writings within the evolving discourse of postcolonial literature, yet neither of these types can adequately account for Kincaid's work. In the first type of postcolonial literature, according to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, writers are part of a "literate elite whose

primary identification is with the colonizing power" (5). In the second type the literature is produced by natives who "have temporarily or permanently entered a specific and privileged class endowed with the language, education, and leisure necessary to produce such works" (5). Furthermore, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin claim that in postcolonial literature, "the potential for subversion in their themes cannot be fully realized" and "they are prevented from fully exploring their anti-imperial potential" (6).

While it is true that Kincaid is an educated, fluent writer, it is also true that her writings fully realize their anti-imperialist potential. Her searing indictment of colonialism in A Small Place, followed by an equally powerful stand against neo-colonialism in Lucy, both give evidence of Kincaid's fully realized response to imperialism.

Similarly to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, Ngugi also states that people are not allowed to realize their full potential while under the spectre of colonialism. He claims that even in countries which have become independent, the legacy of colonialism remains; this legacy keeps writers in fear and disables them from criticizing the colonial powers. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, along with Ngugi, all seem pessimistic about the ability of postcolonial writers to reach their full potential.

Kincaid, however, exceeds these definitions of postcolonial authorship and goes beyond what is expected of a postcolonial writer. Chapter Three will discuss Kincaid's bold and controversial rhetorical style as evidence of a fully realized potential for subversion. Kincaid's work does fulfill the definition of postcolonial literature, but also surpasses it. In addition to responding imaginatively and subversively to the experience of colonialism, her awareness of voice and identity moves beyond the grasp of the colonial legacy.

While postcolonial theory provides helpful tools in assessing Kincaid's work, it is also important to remember that the use of such a term constrains her work. The all-inclusive term "postcolonial" assumes that literature from a variety of cultures and locations will have common features. Such faulty reasoning has been used by colonizing powers to destroy the individual cultures of various people. Ngugi writes,

The Eurocentric basis of seeing the world has often meant marginalising into the periphery that which comes from the rest of the world. One historical particularity is generalised into a timeless and spaceless universality. In that sense, shifting the focus of particularity to a plurality of centres is a welcome antidote. (25)

Universality leads Western academics to the unreasonable conclusion that Western philosophy is universally shared, but that non-Western philosophies are aberrant and

specifically located within the context of the particular country.

The term "postcolonial" suggests that the colonizing powers are responsible for the existence of the literature, and furthermore that only literature created out of the colonizing tradition is worthwhile. The fact that there is not a widely-used corresponding category of "pre-colonial literature" would seem to indicate that no literary tradition existed in marginalized nations before their colonization. Furthermore, the use of the term "postcolonial" has been used to refer to the literature of any country which does not have a respected place in the British canon of literature.

Ngugi proposes that universities create an academic discipline of "literature" in place of "English" which would study literature from a variety of "centres." This should also include an increased awareness of the social and political history of the center from which the literature originates. Because of the vast diversity and dissimilarities in cultures and ideas, this will mean that literature departments will concentrate more broadly on the many literatures that emerge from various locations.

Although postcolonial theories may be inadequate to completely account for Kincaid's literature, there are certainly many elements of postcolonial theory which aid in exploring the texts, particularly the understanding that

postcolonial literatures are unique to their particular location and not bound to the Western patriarchal tradition of literature.

Theories of Black Feminism

Another useful framework for viewing Kincaid's work is that of Black feminism, which is outlined in Patricia Hill Collins' insightful and provocative study, Black Feminist Thought. Her theories provide a background for the empowerment of marginalized people, especially African-American women.

Hill Collins introduces an analysis of the "outsider-within" status of African-American women which supplements the center/periphery dichotomy discussed by Ngugi. According to Hill Collins, African-American women are relegated to an outsider position in both feminist organizations and African-American social and political organizations, which gives them a unique angle of vision from which to view such groups. Their center of reference, which remains located on the periphery, stands both within and without. From within, they are able to observe and understand the dominant culture; from without, they maintain an intellectual community which critiques the dominant culture.

Because Hill Collins intends to write theory that will provide practical answers for African-American women's struggles, she conveys her theoretical concepts in the

language of African-American women. She writes from the perspective of an African-American feminist, including herself in the theories by using "we" and "our" pronouns rather than the "they" and "their" nomenclature demanded by Western theorists. By including herself as part of the subject of the theories she challenges the academic tradition of separation. She unites objectivity and subjectivity, claiming that these two methods of evaluation are neither opposing nor incompatible.

For African-American women, according to Hill Collins, feminism is a process of transformation through which knowledge and action unite. This type of transformation can be seen in Kincaid's protagonists: they engage in the process of transformation which begins with knowledge and culminates in action. While Annie John's education does not include an analysis of colonialism, her sense of justice causes her to question the authorities who claim Columbus and Queen Victoria as heroes. Her ability to question combined with direct resistance matches Hill Collins' definition of Black feminist thought.

Lucy is a slightly older character. Her process of transformation occurs as a result of displacement when she leaves her home in Antigua for the unfamiliar surroundings of New York. When Lucy arrives in the United States, she immediately recognizes inequalities between classes and cultures while her white employers do not. When she meets

her employers and witnesses their extravagant wealth, Lucy begins to engage in feminist thought: she embarks on a process of transformation in which she gains knowledge about the disparities, then actively voices her opinion against injustice.

Conclusions

The postcolonial theories proposed by Ngugi and by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, are useful in viewing Kincaid's work as situated within its own social and cultural location. Ngugi's metaphor of "moving the centre" is particularly useful in discussing postcolonial writing, because postcolonial writings should be viewed for their intrinsic value rather than their relationship to the British tradition.

The view of postcolonial theorists that postcolonial authorship is somehow thwarted in its ability to discuss colonialism is not an accurate view for Kincaid's work. In the subsequent chapters, I will explain how Kincaid's work resists traditional Western schools of criticism, and how she instead uses Black feminist thought and the identification of voice to resist colonialism. Because Kincaid speaks directly against colonialism, and because she moves the center of reference by claiming Antiguan reality as the norm, she has found a method of writing which exceeds the expectations of postcolonial theorists for postcolonial writers.

Isn't it odd that the only language I have in which to speak of this crime is the language of the criminal who committed the crime? And what can that really mean? For the language of the criminal can contain only the goodness of the criminal's deed. The language of the criminal can explain and express the deed only from the criminal's point of view. It cannot contain the horror of the deed, the injustice of the deed, the agony, the humiliation inflicted on me.

--A Small Place 31

CHAPTER III

KINCAID'S RESISTANCE TO LABELS

Jamaica Kincaid strongly opposes any form of labels for her writing. She tells Selwyn Cudjoe in an interview, "I don't really want to be placed in that category (feminism).... I can't bear to be in a group of any kind, or in the school of anything." And given the dissenting views over what kind of writer Kincaid really is, it may very well be true that her work eludes definition of any kind. Covi writes, "Jamaica Kincaid's writing ... defies a realistic interpretation of her voice; it challenges any possibility of deciphering a single meaning by emphasizing multiplicity" (353). While Kincaid's work eludes any singular definition, it is still helpful to discuss her work in terms of its relation to "pre-Oedipal," "Bildungsroman," "Feminist," and "Auto-biographical" writings. Through such frameworks, it is possible to see certain relationships between Western convention and Kincaid's work, as well as the ways in which Kincaid resists Western tradition.

Coming-Of-Age Novelist or
Pre-Oedipal Narrator?

Because much of her writing involves a process of growth, discovery, and demystification, Kincaid's books might be considered coming-of-age, or Bildungsroman. In both Annie John and Lucy, the main character is a young woman of Antigua who is in the process of becoming an adult, and engaging in the demystification of the parents and authorities whom she had formerly deified. In that way, the novels might fit the category of Bildungsroman.

However, while some critics see Kincaid's work as Bildungsroman, others see it very differently. Using as evidence the fact that Kincaid's main characters never completely separate from the mother, Giovanni Covi, Roni Natov, and Laura Niesen de Abruna tend to categorize Kincaid's work as pre-Oedipal narrative. Giovanni Covi writes,

All these stories are structured around the figure of the mother: the writer is constantly connecting artistic creativity to maternity in the effort to create a new representation of the feminine which includes the logic of maternal love. (349)

Is her work involved in separating and growing? Or is it an effort to return to the mother? On this point, critics seem unresolved.

Whether her work is pre-oedipal or coming-of-age, many critics agree that Jamaica Kincaid emerges as one of modern literatures most insightful observers of the conflicted

mother-daughter relationship. Roni Natov asserts that Kincaid's work fills a void observed by Adrienne Rich:

Rich claimed that there was 'no presently enduring recognition of mother-daughter passion and rapture,' that the 'story' of the mother-daughter bond, in language evocative of that intimacy, had not yet been written. Jamaica Kincaid's penetrating novel Annie John is just such a story. (1)

Kincaid has been quoted as saying, "the way I became a writer was that my mother wrote my life for me and told it to me" (Covi 350). In Annie John this very statement becomes part of the narrative. . As a child, Annie learned about her identity through the mother's stories about her. She learned to make these stories her own:

as she held each thing in her hand she would tell me a story about myself. Sometimes I knew the story first hand, for I could remember the incident quite well; sometimes what she told me had happened when I was too young to know anything; and sometimes it happened before I was even born. Whichever way, I knew exactly what she would say, for I had heard it so many times before, but I never got tired of it. No small part of my life was so unimportant that she hadn't made a note of it, and now she would tell it to me over and over again. (21-22)

The mother's stories figure prominently in Kincaid's narrative, and the mother's body also becomes a focal point. Natov writes,

The story of Annie John is told through the body of the mother. As a pre-oedipal narrative, a story in which the mother is the central source of all conflict and movement, its language powerfully suggests merging with the mother's body. It is metaphoric and metonymic, essentially organized and defined by shifting constellations that suggest shading and nuance, rather than unilateral meaning. This is not to say that it is vague, but rather resonant. The narrative unfolds through natural,

organic images that cluster around the mother's body--her hands, her neck, her mouth and hair. (3)

The closeness of mother and daughter which is so eloquently described by Natov is evidence that the categories of pre-oedipal and coming-of-age are inadequate for Kincaid's writings. The lack of agreement over Kincaid's intentions as a writer create an ambiguity that is perhaps her true intention. While the books can be seen as coming-of-age novels, in which the protagonist actively seeks her own identity, they can be also regarded as pre-oedipal narratives in which the child never fully separates from the mother. This unresolved dilemma seems an attempt to destroy the conventional notion that identity requires separation, creating instead an environment in which the creation of identity demands a careful balance between estrangement and solidarity.

Kincaid as Feminist Critic

Clearly Kincaid's work belongs within the category of feminist literature. Indeed, her searing critique of Western feminism demonstrates her dedication to creating a feminist movement which incorporates the voices of all women without regard to race or class. Kincaid skillfully demonstrates the intrinsic relationship between racism, classism, and sexism, revealing their interdependence. Kincaid here is in accordance with the work of social

theorist Patricia Hill Collins, author of Black Feminist Thought, who writes,

Instead of starting with gender and then adding other variables such as age, sexual orientation, race, social class, and religion, Black feminist thought sees these distinctive systems of oppression as being part of one overarching structure of domination. (222)

Kincaid successfully deconstructs white feminist philosophy in Lucy by presenting two women, one African-Caribbean, one Scandinavian-American, in opposition over feminist theoretical viewpoints. In scene after scene, the white feminist viewpoint is seen as complicitous in systems of racism and classism. White feminism, in Lucy's view, derives from books rather than practical experience. Niesen de Abruna comments on the mistaken tendency to consider feminism as universal to women when she writes that "one must be careful to examine the appropriateness of white, middle-class feminist theory to the texts produced by Caribbean women" (278). While feminist critics might choose to claim Kincaid as one of their own, they must consider the fact that Kincaid herself resists the feminist label, and her work clearly expresses a dissatisfaction with traditional feminism.

In Lucy's experience of colonized Antigua, the oppressive educational system based in cultural hegemony and racism was also involved in suppressing and controlling female sexuality. Niesen de Abruna writes, "the same system of British education that erased and colonised indigenous

history also attempted to erase female sexuality and to control the female body." She also states:

there was much cultural violence directed toward women based on popular attitudes toward their sexuality and their bodies. These attitudes were a combination of Victorian ideology and regressive religious views. (279)

Kincaid responds to Western philosophy and the European book with resistance, realizing that the textually-based Western philosophy which created the oppression of women based on race and class is the same philosophy which produced texts on white feminism. Tiffin writes, "Lucy uses her sexuality to re-claim self-identity from the capture and abuse of the black female body within the European 'book'" (919).

Kincaid's feminism interrogates European-American feminism against the background of her own experience.

Kincaid's version of feminism is considered radical by theorist Giovanni Covi:

Perhaps we could say that it is a voice coming after the struggles of the women's movement first for recognition and then for separation: the voice of the third 'new generation of women' as Kristeva defines it: an effort to keep a polyphonic movement in process in the attempt to be always already questioning and dismantling a fixed and metaphysical order, together with a determination to enter history. Her narrative, in fact, is a continuous attempt to turn away from any definitive statement and to utter radical statements. (345)

What is radical about Kincaid's voice is not that she makes conclusive announcements about feminism, but that she is willing to question the situations of women in the world and to gain knowledge about herself as a woman.

Kincaid's feminism is not apart from her racial identity. Indeed, her feminism results from her racial identity, in that the cultural oppression she experienced in Antigua resulted also in her sexual oppression. As a Black feminist intellectual, Kincaid engages in the Black feminist thought outlined by Patricia Hill Collins. This process of interrogation can assist all feminist thinkers in creating a feminist movement which includes all women.

Fiction Versus Autobiography

Kincaid's readers and critics often speculate about the extent to which Kincaid's writings are autobiographical or fictional, perhaps because Kincaid herself concedes that her work is based on real events. Yet even though she uses real life situations in her stories, she uses them to create new stories. She says that the way she became a writer "was that my mother wrote my life for me and told it to me" (Covi 350). In an interview with Kay Bonetti, Kincaid says, "Everything I write is true, and everything is not true." In other words, readers must be careful of assuming that the work is autobiographical.

By using familiar events in her stories, Kincaid engages in the process described by Patricia Hill Collins as struggling to re-interpret familiar realities. For this reason, Kincaid's work should be considered "auto-discovery" rather than "auto-biography." She uses familiar stories freely--not concerned with representing them accurately, but

with re-interpreting the event to discover its meaning. For this reason, readers should not attempt to use literal interpretations of the text to speculate about Kincaid's real life.

Even critics who realize that "autobiography" is a dubious distinction still fall into the trap of using this label for Kincaid's work. Giovanni Covi writes, "We have no reason to question the definition of Annie John's material as 'autobiographical'--but what kind of 'autobiographical' writing is it?" (350). If one has to question the "kind" of autobiography, then perhaps one should refrain from using the label at all.

According to Covi, Chapter Three of Annie John can be seen as a metaphor for Kincaid's method of writing autobiography. In Chapter Three, Annie writes a story about her mother based on a real experience, but reverses and fictionalizes the outcome. According to Covi, this metaphor "shows how 'lies' must enter autobiography when this is meant for a public audience" (350). This evidence should indicate to the reader that Kincaid's work is not necessarily autobiographical. It may be based on real stories, but is not necessarily a faithful representation of the actual events of her life.

Kincaid describes the oral traditions of Antigua in A Small Place in such a way that the reader begins to see Antigua as a nation of stories and interpreters of stories.

Through her descriptions of Antiguan storytelling it becomes increasingly clear that what Kincaid considers a familiar event may in reality be a familiar story based on an historical event. Kincaid explains it this way in A Small Place:

In a small place, people cultivate small events. The small event is isolated, blown up, turned over and over, and then absorbed into the everyday, so that at any moment it can and will roll off the inhabitants of the small place's tongues. (52)

Because Kincaid situates herself within the Antiguan community, she has access to the stories of the community and can use these stories in creating her identity. If one finds that as autobiography the writings are unreliable, it may be because the story was borrowed from another member of the community and altered to fit the immediate needs of the story-teller.

Kincaid's methods of writing, whether they are interpreted as pre-oedipal, coming-of-age, feminist, or autobiographical, all offer a new understanding of such terms. In each case, the terms are inadequate for a complete analysis of Kincaid's work, even though certain elements from each category may enrich the analysis.

The people in a small place cannot give an exact account, a complete account, of themselves. The people in a small place cannot give an exact account, a complete account of events (small though they may be). This cannot be held against them; an exact account, a complete account, of anything, anywhere, is not possible.... The people in a small place can have no interest in the exact, or in completeness, for that would demand a careful weighing, careful consideration, careful judging, careful questioning. It would demand the invention of a silence, inside of which these things could be done. It would demand a reconsideration, an adjustment, in the way they understand the existence of Time. To the people in a small place, the division of Time into the Past, Present, and the Future does not exist. An event that occurred one hundred years ago might be as vivid to them as if it were happening at this very moment. And then, an event that is occurring at this very moment might pass before them with such dimness that it is as if it had happened one hundred years ago.

--A Small Place 53-54

CHAPTER. IV

THE RHETORICAL METHODS

In creating an unique identity for her characters and establishing her authorship as unconventional, Kincaid uses a variety of rhetorical methods. The unreliable narrator, the use of circumstantial evidence, circular views of time, and multi-layered spaces, all contribute to the creation of a center of reference which is located specifically in the context of Antiguan reality.

The Art of Deception:

The Unreliable Narrator

Kincaid uses unreliable narrators to demonstrate the innocence of colonized people who must react to their victimization. Colonialism creates an atmosphere of deception, and the subjects of colonialism must reciprocate with shrewdness.

Deception figures prominently in Kincaid's work both as a response to the beguiling British text and as the essence of the Antiguan response to colonialism. Kincaid describes the colonial experience as based in falsehood and manipulation. In A Small Place, she writes that she first became acquainted with the British text in the Antiguan

library, "taking in, again and again, the fairy tale of how we met you, your right to do the things you did, how beautiful you were, are, and always will be" (42). In all of Kincaid's writings, the falsehoods which create and perpetuate oppression are cleverly juxtaposed with the inventiveness and creativity of the colonized subject. In the context of colonialism, deception becomes necessary for the survival of each party.

Kincaid's narrators reveal their unreliability in various ways. Kincaid's first book, At the Bottom of the River, contains many passages in which the narrator's interpretation is often suspect. In the second chapter of At the Bottom of the River, "In the Night," she makes up a story based on the noises of the night:

There is the sound of a man groaning in his sleep; there is the sound of a woman disgusted at the man groaning. There is the sound of the man stabbing the woman, the sound of her blood as it hits the floor, the sound of Mr. Straffee, the undertaker, taking her body away. There is the sound of her spirit back from the dead, looking at the man who used to groan. (7)

This story begins as nighttime sounds which scared the child narrator, and culminates in a story created by the child to reconcile her fears. This use of circumstantial evidence to create stories indicates an unreliable narrator.

Kincaid uses unreliable narrators as a natural result of the oppression experienced by her characters. Annie John and Lucy both narrate their own stories, and both characters realize that their status as colonized subjects necessitates

deception. Annie John is seen as openly equivocal, especially in her relationship with her mother. Annie, as narrator, describes an event in which she measures her maturity by the extent to which she succeeds in deceiving her mother. This story describes the daughter's triumphant effort to hide her collection of marbles from her mother and disavow her hobby of playing with them. Because she is so adept at deceiving her mother, it becomes clear that a colonized subject learns to deceive the colonizer in order to protect her possessions or her freedom.

Lucy is also seen as unreliable in the sense that she often refrains from voicing her feelings for the New Yorkers she meets. She feigns friendship with Mariah, Peggy, Paul, Hugh, and Lewis. Because of her precarious position as an immigrant she cannot afford to alienate others.

Because the narrator tells the audience her true feelings yet abstains from expressing these feelings to the other characters, the narration becomes multi-layered. It becomes difficult to distinguish the truth from the deceptions. The audience begins to question all of the narrator's statements.

The unreliable narrators of Kincaid's work not only succeed at varnishing the truth, but also keenly perceive the fabrications of others. Lucy recognizes her mother's way of inventing stories about the foods she didn't like in an effort to coax her to eat. Annie John warns her young

friend to be wary of a mother's tricks: "I told her that her mother must have been playing a trick on her.... since it was just the sort of trick my mother would play on me" (9). In At the Bottom of the River, the narrator notices that her mother mocks her. She senses her mother "laughing out of the corner of a mouth I could not see" (57). Deception becomes a tool of the narrator, but it is also a tool of the colonizer against which she must constantly guard herself.

Kincaid uses unreliable narrators to show the disastrous effects of colonialism. Colonialism is founded upon deception: the belief that Europeans are superior and therefore justified in oppressing all others. By creating characters who must react to deception with deception, Kincaid demonstrates the impossibility of creating positive relationships between colonized and colonizers. Through this rhetorical technique, she asserts that unequal and oppressive relationships, even between individuals, must be equalized before people can share themselves with one another as a community of equals. The Western reader is forced out of complacency: the reader must work to understand the narrator's perspective.

Kincaid Challenges Binary Oppositions

Kincaid's storytelling methods represent a shift from the linear tradition of the British text. By creating a circular view of time and space, Kincaid creates an

atmosphere in which she privileges the female voice and begins the process of claiming an identity as a woman. The rhetorical method augments Kincaid's powerful language which affirms her womanhood and her Antiguan identity. Time moves in a circular motion and space becomes amorphous and divergent.

The circular motion of time in Kincaid's work defies the patriarchal concept of linearity. Covi, in his examination of At the Bottom of the River, explains that non-linearity is a uniquely feminine conception of time. He quotes Kristeva who theorizes that "the time of feminine subjectivity is either cyclical or monumental--the repetition of biological cycles and the myth of the archaic Mother--rather than linear-historical" (352). Covi contends that Annie John mocks the patriarchal notion of time with adverbial phrases such as "On the Sunday before the Monday," and he notes that the narrative "never refers to time outside of that of its own story" (352). By resisting patriarchal notions of time, Kincaid creates a narrative which is not distracted from, but rather centered around the main character's development.

The patriarchal tradition regards time and space as separate entities. Feminist philosophers, however, have challenged that notion. Giovanni Covi quotes Luce Irigaray who recognizes that "sexual difference rests on the interdependence between space and time" (352). Irigaray

says that the creation of space is attributed to "the subject-God who is time itself" (352) and that time then becomes interior to the subject while space remains exterior. Irigaray further states that "the feminine-maternal, being the place of creation, the container for the baby and the man, becomes deprived of her own place-identity-self" (352). Rather than accept the Western patriarchal notion that time and space are separate, Kincaid creates a multi-faceted environment in which they converge. As Hill Collins suggests, Western notions of objectivity and separation are antithetical to Black feminist thought, which insists upon the unity of elements such as mind and body or time and space.

Kincaid creates a character in "Ma Chess" (Annie John) who resists binary oppositions. According to Covi, patriarchal discourse has always assigned a specific place to women, usually confining them within the walls of a house, while men retain their freedom. Ma Chess, in protesting patriarchal tradition, refuses to be "placed within the symbolic order of sexual opposition" (352). Ma Chess says, "A house? Why live in a house? All you need is a nice hole in the ground, so you can come and go as you please" (126). Her refusal to be restricted to the traditional "place" of women demonstrates a strong female character engaged in Black feminism.

Kincaid's resistance to Western patriarchal texts is perhaps most powerfully displayed in the final scene of Lucy, when her tears erase her own words on the page of her journal. Although she herself is a writer, Kincaid continually interrogates the praxis of writing and the Western conventions expected of writers.

In resisting patriarchal divisions of time and space, Kincaid's narrators often cycle back to the beginning of a story, which Covi says indicates "the insistent refusal to stick to a definitive statement; by going back to the beginning again and again." As an example, Covi uses the chapter "What I have been Doing Lately" from At the Bottom of the River, which "ends where it begins and re-begins in the middle of its non-linear movement" (349). The effect of circularity is intentional non-resolution: "the ultimate order/meaning is never reached" (349). Kincaid's stories refuse to end with simple resolutions. Her emphasis is on process, mutual exchange of ideas, and community-building rather than problem-solving.

While readers expect an author to provide resolutions in their writings, Kincaid does not do so. Because the deplorable situations caused by colonialism still have not been corrected, Kincaid's refusal to provide easy answers is appropriate. Her writings indicate a need for communities to work together to resolve the problems created by oppression and colonization, and especially for those who

have benefitted from colonization to listen and respond to the solutions proposed by those most affected.

Kincaid's rhetorical methods lend to the understanding of her work as part of the resistance movement outlined by Ngugi. She effectively moves the center in her writings by creating a text which challenges Western conventions.

Kincaid also establishes herself as a Black feminist in her refusal to accept patriarchal notions of time and space.

Kincaid's work indicates a strong voice against colonization through her ability to use the unreliable narrator as a symbol of the deception experienced by colonized subjects. She also creates an environment in which women refuse to be subjugated and in which they begin to articulate their concerns. Because she does not provide simple solutions and instead resists resolution, Kincaid reminds her audience that the destruction caused by colonization has not been resolved, and that the answers to these problems must generate from the affected communities.

But what I see is the millions of people, of whom I am just one, made orphans: no motherland, no fatherland, no gods, no mounds of earth for holy ground, no excess of love which might lead to the things that an excess of love sometimes brings, and worst and most painful of all, no tongue.

--A Small Place 31

Chapter V

AN OUTSIDER-WITHIN CROSS-EXAMINES WHITE LIBERALISM

Kincaid's work directly opposes Western philosophy and traditions, and in the process exposes white feminism for its collusion with patriarchal and neo-colonial practices. The title character of Lucy gains a voice throughout the novel which continually resists Western feminism, and which moves the center of reference for her audience.

Kincaid's scrutiny of Western philosophy and text is eloquently pronounced through the employer/employee relationship in Lucy. When the title character Lucy arrives in New York to work as an au pair, she immediately begins to notice the difference between her own epistemology and that of Western feminists.

Black Feminist Thought Challenges White Feminism

Kincaid's Lucy provides a provocative case-study for what Hill Collins describes as "Black feminist thought," a process which "aims to develop a theory that is emancipatory and reflective and which can aid African-American women's struggles against oppression" (32). Black feminist thought

recognizes the unity of mind and body and rejects the dichotomies created by Western philosophy.

According to Hill Collins, Western thought requires objectification and insists upon an either/or conceptual stance. Hill Collins writes that "Either/or dichotomous thinking categorizes people, things, and ideas in terms of their differences from one another" (68). An emphasis on difference leads to objectification and subjugation when the "other" is "viewed as an object to be manipulated and controlled" (69). Black feminist thought, on the contrary, involves the deconstruction of the "either/or" dichotomy and the insistence on the "both/and" conceptual stance. This standpoint reconciles subjectivity and objectivity and creates an environment in which ideas are validated through a merger of thought and action (28).

Hill Collins describes the process of becoming a feminist as a "process of transformation, of struggling to develop new interpretations of familiar realities" (27). Lucy engages in this process when she begins to develop an awareness of herself as a displaced individual. On a train ride with Mariah she takes note of her position when she says, "the other people sitting down to dinner all looked like Mariah's relatives; the people waiting on them all looked like mine" (32). Lucy does not immediately voice her opinion, but these experiences contribute to her development as an active and vocal feminist.

While she had previously yearned for a change in environment, she comes to realize that it was not her environment but herself that would transform. From the moment Lucy arrives in New York, she notices differences between her expectations and the reality of her new life. At first these contrasts are simply material and physical--new appliances, changes in climate--but soon the disparities become epistemological.

In her first observation of her new home, Lucy mentions the luxurious conditions which had previously been unknown to her. She says,

I always lived in a house, and my house did not have a refrigerator in it. Everything I was experiencing--the ride in the elevator, being in the apartment, eating day-old food that had been stored in a refrigerator--was such a good idea that I could imagine I would grow used to it and like it very much. (4)

Lucy remains skeptical about these comforts, immediately recognizing the accompanying dangers. She notices that wealthy people must keep bars on their windows to protect their possessions. She thinks,

couldn't human beings in their position--wealthy, comfortable, beautiful, with the best the world had to offer at their finger tips--be safe and secure and never suffer so much as a broken fingernail? (85)

Lucy's unique angle of vision, characterized by Hill Collins as the "outsider-within," allows her to see through the shallow facade of her new environment. Hill Collins writes that African-American women who work as domestic workers

observe the lives of their employers from an inside view. They can de-mystify the dominant culture because of their close proximity, and their "marginality provides a distinctive angle of vision on the theories put forth" by the dominant culture.

When Lucy employs her unique angle of vision, she views a reality imperceptible to her employers. She quickly discerns that the affluence of this new place is an unreal fantasy:

As we drove along, someone would single out to me a famous building, an important street, a park, a bridge that when built was thought to be a spectacle. In a daydream I used to have, all these places were points of happiness to me; all these places were lifeboats to my small drowning soul.... Now that I saw these places, they looked ordinary, dirty, worn down.... It was not my first bout with the disappointment of reality and it would not be my last. (3-4)

Hill Collins argues that one distinguishing feature of Black feminist thought is its insistence that both the changed consciousness of individuals and the social transformation of political and economic institutions constitute essential ingredients for social change. Most significantly, the transformation of knowledge is an essential ingredient of social change (221).

The distinctions Lucy notices between her home in Antigua and her employer's home in New York cause her to radically question her understanding of "truth." The change in weather provokes a tremendous shift in her awareness. She says,

Something I had always known--the way I knew my skin was the color brown of a nut rubbed repeatedly with a soft cloth, or the way I knew my own name--something I took completely for granted, 'the sun is shining, the air is warm,' was not so. I was no longer in a tropical zone, and this realization now entered my life like a flow of water dividing formerly dry and solid ground. (5)

Shifts in her physical reality prompt her to question the deeper ontological differences between herself and her employers. She begins a process of re-evaluating her conception of truth.

Lucy's unique insight as outsider-within enables her to analyze the assumptions of her employer in a way that creates tension between them. At first, Lucy describes Mariah as sweet, kind, even childlike. Her innocence becomes a source of amusement for Lucy who continually repeats the question, "How did she get to be that way?" Lucy views Mariah's yellow-haired existence as one of luxury and comfort. "How luxurious," she thinks, "to have an empty room in your house, a room that nobody really needed" (86). Mariah's perfect world presents a paradox for Lucy, when she discovers that Mariah

had too much of everything, and so she longed to have less; less, she was sure, would bring her happiness. To me it was a laugh and a relief to observe the unhappiness that too much can buy; I had been used to observing the results of too little. (87)

Lucy expresses genuine amazement at Mariah's circumstances. Most puzzling to her is Mariah's inability to appreciate her fortunate conditions:

Mariah was beyond doubt or confidence. I thought, Things must have always gone her way ... she has never had to doubt, and so she has never had to grow confident; the right thing always happens to her; the thing she wants to happen happens. (26)

However, rather than express anger or envy toward Mariah, Lucy excuses her, calling her "the kindest person I had ever known" (73). While Mariah does not recognize her privilege, Lucy is acutely aware of it. Lucy gathers information about Mariah, using the information to strengthen her epistemology and eventually to create a more powerful voice against oppression.

Contrasting her own circumstances with Mariah's, Lucy sees herself as the victim of tragic circumstances. She says that as a child she "came to think that heavy and hard was the beginning of living, real living" (25). A friend of her mother's had a mark on her cheek, a symbol of her difficult life, and Lucy realizes, "though I might not end up with a mark on my cheek, I had no doubt that I would end up with a mark somewhere" (25). Lucy begins to realize that her reality is different from Mariah's, and through this realization begins to trust her own opinion over Mariah's.

Lucy connects her deplorable situation to the legacy of colonialism and begins to see Mariah's affiliation with the oppressors who destroyed her homeland. She says, "I had realized that the origin of my presence on the island--my ancestral history--was the result of a foul deed" (135).

She expresses resentment about her condition when describing her room:

The ceiling was very high and the walls went all the way up to the ceiling, enclosing the room like a box--a box in which cargo traveling a long way should be shipped. But I was not cargo. I was only an unhappy young woman living in a maid's room. (7)

Lucy links her unhappiness to the combined misfortune of being female and being from a marginalized nation: "I was not a man; I was a young woman from the fringe of the world, and when I left my home I had wrapped around my shoulders the mantle of a servant" (95). Lucy is aware of her own oppression, but Mariah is incapable of recognizing her complicity in the oppression. While Mariah celebrates her freedom, Lucy recognizes the poverty inherent to her situation.

While Mariah is free to do as pleases her, Lucy's family has specific expectations of her. Lucy says, "I had been a girl of whom certain things were expected, none of them too bad: a career as a nurse, for example; a sense of duty to my parents; obedience to the law and worship of convention" (133). Leaving home had been an attempt to escape these expectations, but she discovered that her circumstances would not change. Lucy greatly resents the station imposed on her. When her mother insists she become a nurse she wonders, "what made anyone think a nurse could be made of me.... Why did someone not think that I would make a good doctor or a good magistrate or a good someone who runs

things?" (92). Lucy articulates a growing resentment toward both her mother and toward Mariah, whom she begins to resent for their alliance with patriarchy and imperialism.

The gap between Lucy's growing knowledge and Mariah's ignorance grows larger as the story progresses. Lucy notes, "[Mariah] acted in her usual way, which was that the world was round and we all agreed on that, when I knew that the world was flat and if I went to the edge I would fall off" (32). A subtle comparison between Mariah and Lucy's nemesis Columbus implies Lucy's increasing discomfort in her relationship with Mariah. As Lucy gains confidence and strengthens her epistemology, her relationship with Mariah becomes ever more tenuous...

The Target Audience

In an interview with Jamaica Kincaid, Selwyn Cudjoe remarks that the predominant audience for Kincaid's public presentations is white and politically liberal. Indeed the typical audience member Cudjoe describes seems remarkably similar to the character of Mariah.

Rather than create a typically conservative, outwardly racist character for the employer of Lucy, Kincaid depicts a feminist and political activist--a member of the United States' "counter-culture." Lucy describes a photograph of Mariah in which she "wore her yellow hair long and unkempt, and did not shave her legs or underarms, as a symbol of something, and was not a virgin and had not been for a long

time" (80). When Lucy arrives in New York Mariah is forty years old, and though she now pays close attention to her grooming, she still actively rallies for a variety of liberal causes. She reads and recommends books on feminism; she belongs to an organization which fights to save the wetlands from commercial developers; and she detests the fur industry.

On first glance it might seem odd that Kincaid would create such a character as an adversary for Lucy. Mariah wavers from uneasy friend to antagonist, even though Lucy claims to genuinely like her. Their relationship is strained. As Lucy becomes increasingly uncomfortable she begins to voice her anger through disparaging remarks; Mariah, with her previously untested liberalism, begins to wonder how to avoid giving offense. While Mariah delights in introducing Lucy to new experiences, (the lake home, the woods, and the daffodils), Lucy reacts with disappointment and even fury. The lake, Lucy says, is cold and uninviting. The woods frighten her. Her response to the daffodils is that she wants to drag a scythe across the field and kill them all.

The flowers represent for Lucy the British domination of her homeland because she was forced to recite Wordsworth's poem about them as a child. Her virulent reaction to the flowers surprises them both, but her subsequent reflection

on the incident strengthens her convictions about the oppressive nature of her situation. She says,

I felt sorry that I had cast her beloved daffodils in a scene she had never considered, a scene of conquered and conquests; a scene of brutes masquerading as angels and angels portrayed as brutes. (30)

Lucy's voice begins to surprise her, as her words sometimes seem to leap out of her mouth without her permission. Lucy is becoming a feminist in the manner described by Hill Collins because she unifies her thoughts with her actions. As Lucy becomes more aware of injustice, her voice increases in power.

As Lucy gains strength, Mariah's discomfort increases. Her unexamined liberal views meet their first challenge and do not fare well under pressure. Hill Collins explains that while people can easily identify "their own victimization within some major system of oppression ... they typically fail to see how their thoughts and actions uphold someone else's subordination" (229). Mariah identifies the oppression of women, but her solutions for sexism are limited. She does not see how her own behavior contributes to classism and racism, nor does she see the connections between these oppressions.

Mariah desperately seeks Lucy's friendship, as if Lucy's affirmation could assuage her guilt for being a white woman who has benefitted throughout her life from the oppression of others. But Lucy refuses to give Mariah that conquest.

She says, "The anguish on her face almost broke my heart, but I would not bend. It was hollow, my triumph, I could feel that, but I held on to it just the same" (41). Because Lucy has begun to see Mariah as an enemy to her liberation, she begins to see her friendship as false. She resists any type of relationship with Mariah.

Though the white liberal audience described by Cudjoe may feel betrayed and uneasy with the character of Lucy, Kincaid demonstrates a willingness to be frank and honest with her audience. She will risk hurt feelings to make valid arguments against colonialism and neo-colonialism. She exposes everyone's complicity in the continuation of oppression and exploitation.

In Lucy's observations of affluence, she notices that people like Mariah are unaware of their contribution to poverty. When members of Mariah's environmental organization express concern for the vanishing wetlands, Lucy reacts with scorn: "Like her, all of the members of this organization were well off but they made no connection between their comforts and the decline of the world that lay before them" (72). Lucy's angle of vision as outsider-within provides her with knowledge that is indiscernible to the members of the organization: "I could have told them a thing or two about it. I could have told them how nice it was to see them getting a small sip of their own bad medicine" (72). Of course since no one asks for Lucy's

opinion (she being the disregarded outsider) her knowledge is stored rather than shared.

On the issue of the wetlands Lucy remains silent. She says, "I couldn't bring myself to ask her to examine Lewis's daily conversations with his stockbroker, to see if they bore any relation to the things she saw passing away forever before her eyes" (73). But as Lucy gains confidence she finds a voice to respond to Mariah. Mariah's claim of Indian heritage riles Lucy to the point of exasperation:

Mariah says, 'I have Indian blood in me,' and underneath everything I could swear she says it as if she were announcing her possession of a trophy. How do you get to be the sort of victor who can claim to be the vanquished also? (41)

Lucy's growing resentment of Mariah causes her to react with a mixture of disbelief, anger, and pity. Mariah's inability to see her role in the oppression of others becomes a tremendous source of pain for Lucy.

Lucy's Resistance to the British Text

For Lucy the most frustrating aspect of Mariah's feminism is her reliance on books and theories to explain her life. Tiffin writes, "Mariah's faith in books is equated with her 'yellow' simplicity" (920), and argues that by "relying on 'theories' to explain her life, Mariah has little grasp of the way words enter and mark colonised bodies, and this is part of her 'simplicity'" (920). Mariah's feminism derives almost solely from books. When

Lucy becomes upset with her status as a woman, Mariah uses textually-based arguments in repeatedly unsuccessful attempts to soothe her:

Mariah wanted to rescue me. She spoke of women in society, women in history, women in culture, women everywhere. But I couldn't speak, so I couldn't tell her that my mother was my mother and that society and history were something else altogether. (132)

While Mariah insists on books and theories, Lucy knows that individual experience holds more power.

Because of her dependence on books and theories, Mariah is isolated from real life. When she is faced with a real-life tragedy and cannot find solace from the text, she turns her fear and anger inward rather than acting upon it. While Lucy recognizes struggle as an everyday thing, Mariah fails to comprehend the loss she must confront when first her husband, then her employee intend to leave her. Although Lewis is responsible for the break-up of their marriage, Mariah blames herself. Lucy says,

Mariah did not know that Lewis was not in love with her anymore. It was not the sort of thing she could imagine. She could imagine the demise of the fowl of the air, fish in the sea, mankind itself, but not that the only man she had ever loved would no longer love her. (81)

Mariah is unable to confront reality because she has been sheltered from pain. Her books and theories become an inadequate source of consolation.

Lucy's intention to leave is doubly piercing to Mariah. Again because she has not experienced disappointment, she is

not effective in expressing her anger. When she discovers she cannot "conquer" Lucy, neither as a friend nor as an employee, she demands subservience: "Mariah spoke to me harshly all the time now, and she began to make up rules" (144). Lucy begins to recognize her friendship with Mariah as a seduction: "She used to insist that we be friends, but that had apparently not worked out very well; now I was leaving" (144). This process of domination is described by Hill Collins as operating "by seducing, pressuring or forcing African-American women ... to replace individual and cultural ways of knowing with the dominant group's specialized thought" (229). Because her theories were grounded in the Western patriarchal tradition, Mariah reverts to an authoritative stance when her attempts at friendship are thwarted.

At this point Lucy's separation from Mariah becomes active resistance against oppression, part of her process of transformation. She explains that she has engaged in an artistic enterprise--the creation of herself:

I understood that I was inventing myself, and that I was doing this more in the way of a painter than in the way of a scientist. I could not count on precision or calculation; I could only count on intuition. I did not have anything exactly in mind, but when the picture was complete I would know. I did not have position, I did not have money at my disposal. I had memory, I had anger, I had despair. (134)

Lucy breaks free from Mariah, and through this separation continues to develop her voice and identity. She advances

her knowledge by discovering that Mariah's seemingly perfect world held no substance. The dissolution of Mariah's marriage to Lewis proved that the beauty of Mariah's life was an illusion.

While the dissolution of her marriage to Lewis devastates Mariah, Lucy expresses no surprise. The divergent responses of the two women suit their respective philosophies: Mariah applies a pedantic approach to determining the cause of her problems, while Lucy employs a more intuitive method. Mariah's shame is so great that her only recourse is to move away from the source of the pain. She decides to sell everything and move to another country.

Lucy, on the contrary, had such low expectations of Lewis to begin with that his decision to leave Mariah does not surprise her. She says, "I used to not know who Lewis was, until one day he revealed himself to be just another man, an ordinary man, when I saw him in love with his wife's best friend" (137-8). Lucy considers Lewis an ordinary man, and by ordinary she means unfaithful, without morals, and indifferent to the feelings of others. She wants to tell Mariah,

Your situation is an everyday thing. Men behave in this way all the time.... where I came from, every woman knew this cliché, and a man like Lewis would not have been a surprise.... Everybody knew that men have no morals, that they do not know how to behave, that they do not know how to treat other people. (141-2)

Lucy gains strength for her voice by confirming her knowledge. As Antiguan wisdom proves true, she comes closer to reclaiming her heritage, and through it, her identity.

Lucy's Disdain for "Mankind"

While Lucy expects Lewis to behave without morals, she has similar expectations for all men. When attracted to a man she holds steadily to her belief in his infidelity. She likes Hugh and enjoys his company, but does not invest any emotions in her relationship with him. Even when she wonders whether she may be pregnant with his child, Lucy does not allow herself to entertain any possibility of a permanent or committed relationship. Of Hugh, Lucy says,

if I were told that he had left unexpectedly on a trip and would not be back for a long time, I would have to say too bad, for I had not yet grown tired of him, and accept it with no more than a shrug of my shoulders. (71)

Lucy maintains a distance with men so as not to lose the power she has gained. She is constantly aware that women lose their power and their voices when in relationships with men.

Lucy envies and resents the status men occupy in the world. She takes offense to men in general, but especially those who enjoy an elevated and superior station. At a party she speculates about the men around her who seem impervious to humility or modesty: "They were talking about the world, they were talking about themselves, and they seemed to take for granted that everything they said

mattered" (99). She notes that men have an air of self-importance, and that they assume their words will always be heard with reverence.

Lucy avoids friendships with men because she is not willing to forfeit her newly-acquired voice. She says, "I did not know men very well then; the things I did know about them were not so very good" (159). She believes that her mother's marriage to her father was a tragic circumstance. Eleanor Ty writes that

Lucy blames her mother for accepting patriarchal culture's hierarchical gender distinctions, for replicating its value systems in the unequal treatment of her and her brothers. She also scorns her mother for wasting her life on a man ... believing that her mother 'had betrayed herself' in her devotion to him. (125)

Ty further contends that Lucy's refusal to become emotionally involved with men results from a fear of repeating her mother's mistake. Ty writes, "Much of the anger she directs to her mother is in response to the fear of becoming like her, someone she views as having thrown away her intelligence" (126). Lucy purposely detaches from men, not only because of her career ambitions, but also because she cannot risk losing her power or voice.

When Lucy becomes involved with Paul, she views him with disinterest and even disdain. She neither likes nor dislikes Paul--she simply tolerates his presence. When he becomes possessive, she reacts by withdrawal: "he got the idea he possessed me in a certain way, and that was the

moment I grew tired of him" (155). When Lucy discovers that Paul and Peggy have become secretly involved with each other, Lucy hardly reacts. She says, "the two of them were busy at something, and I suspected it was with each other. I only hoped they would not get angry and disrupt my life when they realized I did not care" (163). She steadfastly guards her emotions because she cannot afford to lose control of her voice.

A predominant theme of Lucy is that of challenging Western patriarchal notions, especially as they appear within the tenets of feminism. While Lucy struggles to gain a voice and maintain her independence, she also yearns for home and family. The knowledge she gains as an outsider-within causes radical questioning of her surroundings, and she eventually develops an effective voice against oppression. She becomes careful to defend herself against further violations, and though she is realistic about her circumstances she continues to strengthen her epistemology as feminist and anti-imperialist.

I look at this place (Antigua), I look at these people (Antiguans), and I cannot tell whether I was brought up by, and so come from, children, eternal innocents, or artists who have not yet found eminence in a world too stupid to understand, or lunatics who have made their own lunatic asylum, or an exquisite combination of all three

--A Small Place 57

CHAPTER VI

IDENTIFICATION WITH LANGUAGE AND HOME

In both Annie John and Lucy, the main protagonist is a young woman who struggles to discover her independence while balancing her ambivalent feelings toward her community, family, and home. Both main characters focus their attention on women, and their significant relationships are only with women. They both recognize women's voices as more substantial and important than the voices of men.

The Insignificant Male Voice

In Annie John, the main character Annie is disdainful of men, noting that their conversations are meaningless, prosaic recitations. Annie often complains about her father's stories, and she expresses indignation with her mother for encouraging him: "My father ... was regaling us with another one of his stories about when he was a young man.... What he said now must have been funny, for my mother couldn't stop laughing" (32). Not only does Annie show contempt for her father's words, but she uses his inability to form meaningful conversation as a metaphor for his ability to form relationships within a community.

Annie cannot tolerate male conversation, which she views as purposeless. She dreads listening to her father:

There he would sit and talk to the night watchman about cricket or some other thing that didn't interest me, because it was not personal; they didn't talk about their wives, or their children, or their parents, or about any of their likes and dislikes. (144)

Because he never discusses his personal feelings, is debilitated in his relationships with others.

When Annie leaves home, her father is unable to say a meaningful farewell. She says, "I could see that he wanted to say something else, something that he had never said to me before, but then he just turned and walked away" (147). Annie's father cannot express himself, and so remains inconsequential in Annie's life and in the narrative she tells.

The Potency of the Mother's Voice

In direct opposition to the ineffectual voices of men, the language of women in Kincaid's books explode with meaning. While Annie's father can barely speak to her at her departure, the mother's parting words cause an intense physical and emotional response. The mother's voice "rakes across" Annie's skin when she says, "It doesn't matter what you do or where you go, I'll always be your mother and this will always be your home" (147). These words affect Annie so strongly that she says, "I dragged myself away from her and backed off a little, and then I shook myself, as if to

wake myself out of a stupor" (147). While Kincaid's male characters utter trivialities, her female characters communicate (verbally and non-verbally) with a deadly, ground-shifting power capable of making great changes in environment and relationships. Their language becomes a powerful force which connects them to one another.

As Annie enters puberty, the mother's verbal and non-verbal discourse become a life-force. When her mother refuses to sew matching outfits for them Annie says, "To say that I felt the earth swept away from under me would not be going too far" (26). A simple word, phrase, or gesture from her mother can cause Annie to panic in fear because she interprets any rift in their communication as a loss of love. Such a loss would signal the end of her life, her validity within the community, and her own identity. Niesen de Abruna writes, "the narrators in Kincaid's fiction resist separation from the mother as a way of denying their intense fear of death" (274). Indeed Annie listens to her mother's words as if her life depends upon them.

A non-verbal intimacy between mother and daughter marks the first two chapters of Annie John. In this pre-lingual world, Annie describes her life with her mother as a paradise, saying, "she might stoop down and kiss me on my lips and then on my neck. It was in such a paradise that I lived" (25). She claims to know her mother's thoughts (87), and says that "If my mother died, I would have to die too"

(88). This intimacy is described as a sort of nirvana in which the daughter merges completely with the mother. Once the daughter gains a voice, however, her words create deep rifts in the relationship.

Kincaid's daughter characters, once they develop the voice to speak, express conflicting feelings toward their mothers. They replace loyal adulation with intense fear and animosity. The mother's awesome power both inspires and terrifies. Because the mother is so powerful, the daughter feels she must counter with an even stronger voice. Both Annie John and Lucy develop their voices to resist their mothers' power.

The mother's words, even as the daughter characters gain independence, continue to invoke fear and admiration. As an adult Lucy still feels bound by her mother's statement, "You can run away, but you cannot escape the fact that I am your mother, my blood runs in you, I carried you for nine months inside me" (90). Lucy says, "How else was I to take such a statement but as a sentence for life in a prison whose bars were stronger than any iron imaginable?" (1). The mother's voice is so strong that her advice, even given off-handedly, become mandate. Lucy's mother's feeling that a woman should always be taller than her husband and that she should always own her own home guides Lucy's decisions, and her constant drills of warning against becoming a "slut" govern her activities until she ultimately rebels.

Daughters and Sexuality

Moira Ferguson, in her book Jamaica Kincaid: Where the Land Meets the Body, suggests that the mother's constant emphasis on chastity is an attempt to rectify past mistakes or reconstruct her past through the daughter. She writes, "the mother's anxiety may project a desire to prevent her daughter from repeating behavior that the mother had to live down or deny in her past" (16). A dominant theme of Kincaid's writings involves this motif of repeated admonitions about becoming a "slut." In the first chapter of At the Bottom of the River for example, the mother's voice repeatedly accuses her daughter of being "bent" on becoming a "slut."

In Annie John, the mother rebukes her daughter for talking to some boys on the street saying, "after all the years she had spent drumming into me the proper way to conduct myself when speaking to young men it pained her to see me behave in the manner of a slut in the street" (102). The mother repeats the word "slut" until Annie says, "suddenly I felt as if I were drowning in a well but instead of the well being filled with water it was filled with the world 'slut,' and it was pouring in through my eyes, my ears, my nostrils, my mouth" (102). On this occasion, the mother's anger and the daughter's response cause a permanent rift in their relationship which eventually culminates in Annie's decision to leave home.

Lucy, in a similar situation, rebels against her mother's constant admonitions about becoming a slut by, as Eleanor Ty reports, "refusing to be the proper, clean, and chaste girl her mother idealizes.... Lucy rejects all her mother's lessons to be ladylike and deliberately sets out to be a 'slut'" (124). The daughter's response to sexual repression provides a metaphor for the entire process of painful separation of mother and daughter. Natov writes that "the struggle to separate from the mother ... is particularly wrenching for girls, for to separate is to deny the mother, which for girls is also to deny some part of the self" (2). Though both Annie John and Lucy try desperately to separate from their mothers, neither is completely successful.

The Partially Successful Detachment

Both Annie John and Lucy use different methods in an attempt to separate from the mother. Annie John tries silence when she retreats to bed with the prolonged illness which Roni Natov describes as "a world of silence and darkness ... regression into the pre-verbal semiotic world of pulsations" (9). During this period of change Annie, "goes back to the pre-oedipal world ... to restore herself. She does not speak" (9-10). Silence allows Annie John to separate from her mother, but since her strengthening identity depends on her voice, she is unable to persist in

her silence. She must eventually return from this semiotic world and use language to gain her freedom.

Three of Kincaid's daughter characters share a significant event which shows the daughter gaining independence through the use of her voice, yet agonizing over the effects of her new-found strength. The scene first appears in At the Bottom of the River: "Immediately on wishing my mother dead and seeing the pain it caused her, I was sorry and cried so many tears that all the earth around me was drenched" (53). And the same painful scene is repeated in both Annie John and Lucy.

In Annie John the story reappears in expanded form. This time the mother and daughter have an enormous fight. Annie later says, "I have forgotten everything except that at the end I turned and said, 'I wish you were dead.'" This verbal eruption causes Annie to feel "hollow inside" and inflicts her mother with a headache, so that through the night she makes "moaning sounds as she paced up and down the house, because the pain kept her awake" (119). Annie discovers a potent voice, but the resulting pain causes her to regret using it.

Again the story is repeated in Lucy, but this time the daughter's angry words revisit her, causing her to share the same physiological damage as her mother: "I had begun to suffer from violent headaches, exactly like the ones that used to afflict my mother." She traces the cause of these

headaches to her words, "I wish you were dead" (94). Her headaches reveal a connection with her mother through language. Because the connection is so deeply ingrained, it is impossible for the daughter to consciously detach from it.

Both Annie John and Lucy use the language of naming to further explore their identity. They use their own names as reference points. Both characters express the desire to change their names to "Enid," after a favorite author of children's books, Enid Blyton. But both eventually reject the name in favor of her own. At the end of Annie John, Annie recovers her identity by calling out her name, and as Covi states, Annie comes to the realization that although she has the same name as her mother, "the two of them are two separate selves" (351). Her name and her language continue to connect Annie with her mother.

Lucy explains that she did not like her name, "Lucy Josephine Potter." She says, "I used to hate all three of my names" (149). She goes on to say, "Lucy ... seemed slight, without substance" (149). Her middle name "Josephine" came from her great-uncle Joseph, a man who foolishly lost his fortune. And her last name "Potter" came from the slave owners who had owned her ancestors. However, when she discovers that "Lucy" is a nickname for "Lucifer," she is thrilled. She says, "I went from feeling burdened and old and tired to feeling light, new clean. I was

transformed from failure to triumph. It was the moment I knew who I was" (152). Helen Tiffin writes that this process of embracing her name is essential to Lucy's self-defined identity. She writes that Lucy "moves from being named by someone else to her true-true name ... at the end" (919). Re-claiming and embracing her name establishes a love for both her voice and her identity.

While Kincaid's female characters rebel at times against their mothers and their home of Antigua, they also take comfort in knowing that they may always return home. Annie John and Lucy both express a mixture of anguish and relief, knowing that a separation from their mothers could never be complete. Lucy refuses to read her mother's letters, yet she stores them in her blouse, close to her heart. She says

I thought of opening the letters, not to read them but to burn them at the four corners and send them back to her unread. It was an act, I had read somewhere, of one lover rejecting another, but I could not trust myself to go too near them. I knew that if I read only one, I would die from longing for her. (91)

Lucy discovers that she cannot separate completely from her mother because her voice and identity is intricately bound with her mother and her homeland. While creating an identity and naming herself is an important step toward adulthood, she also comes to realize and appreciate her commitment to home and family.

Home, family, mother and motherland become inextricably bound in a woman's sense of self. Ty quotes Morris and Dunn

who "stress that for the Caribbean woman, the notion of a motherland encompasses connotations of 'her island home and its unique culture as well as the body of tropes, talismans, and female bonding.... A woman needs to claim a connection to both the land and one's mothers in order to be 'well prepared for the journey toward self-identity and fulfillment" (126). Kincaid's characters realize that they belong completely to their home and their mothers.

Several critics agree that Kincaid's images of mother and motherland are self-reflexive. Eleanor Ty writes,

The mother is associated with the customs and landscapes of her island home of Antigua.... the thoughts of mother invoke the sun-drenched islands of Lucy's 'motherland,' but these memories are also ironically linked to the loss of culture and the loss of this mother country. (124)

The daughters must strike a balance between merging and separating from their mothers. They may want to reject those elements of home which they associate with the colonizer; yet in rejecting their homeland, they comply with the colonizers who demand the renunciation of native cultures and languages.

Yet though she may want to maintain her language and culture, Moira Ferguson points out that the colonizer-colonized association can destroy a woman's attempt to create an unique identity. The daughter seeks freedom yet requires protection from the mother/colonizer. Ferguson writes, "The many discussions about motherhood and colonialism ... overlap and spill into one another....

Caught up in fear, suspicion, and a vulnerable need for safety, the protagonist craves to break loose" (2). While they realize the importance of their culture and language, colonized women risk further exploitation by preserving their links to home.

The mother can also be seen as a threat to independence because she is a symbol of the home country ("motherland"). Niesen de Abruna explains: "there is a correlation between the political difficulties afflicting the island-'mother' country relationship and the problems affecting the mother-daughter family relationship" (259). Ty further states that Lucy grapples

with the many implications of otherness in the new 'motherland.' However, this sense of 'otherness,' being so closely associated with the maternal, often manifests itself as a mythic conflict and struggle with a real or bodily mother. (126)

A vital link for Kincaid's characters in establishing identity is to connect with the mother and the motherland, yet the political implications can be threatening. For victims of colonization, connecting with home can be positive when it leads to self-awareness, or negative when it leads to compliance with oppression.

Identification Within a Community

Kincaid's characters seem driven by the need to establish an identity in communion with their mothers or other women. Their intense friendships with other girls indicate a need for closeness. In At the Bottom of the River, a young woman says, "Now I am a girl, but one day I will marry a woman--a red-skin woman with black bramblebush hair and brown eyes, who wears skirts that are so big I can easily bury my head in them" (11). Through their relationships with women, Kincaid's female characters explore, as Ty states, "the psychic, emotional and social consequences of the loss of the mother and the motherland" (123). Sustaining these loving relationships with women can help to compensate for the devastating loss of motherland.

Hill Collins writes that a key element to Black feminism is the existence of supportive female relationships. She states that Black feminism takes place when African-American women share their experiences and exchange their ideas as members of a community. Black feminism, then, is in contrast to patriarchal culture, which critics say aim to create separations between women by creating dichotomy (Hill Collins, Natov, Ty).

Lucy "moves the centre" by directly resisting patriarchal attempts to separate women when she claims her allegiance to Mariah. She says, "My sympathies were with Mariah. It was my mother who had told me that I should

never take a man's side over a woman's" (48). As part of her resistance to patriarchy, Lucy heeds her mother's advice and privileges women over men.

Though the daughter characters struggle throughout each narrative to establish independent voices, the narratives end without a clear break; instead, the power of kinship and community is affirmed through the daughter's realization that she can never separate fully from her mother. When Lucy makes the surprising admission, "I was not like my mother--I was my mother," she comes to the realization that her identity is immersed with that of her mother.

While the establishment of voice and identity is part of the growth of each individual, Jamaica Kincaid places herself and her literary creations as members of a community. Even as their uniqueness is affirmed and celebrated, they cannot forget the significance of family, friends, and home.

Chapter VII

CONCLUSION

Summary

Kincaid's rhetorical style of writing, her ability to weave stories, and her forthright critique of colonialism combine to make her work a powerful and resistant voice against oppression. Critics have attempted to place her work within various categories of literary theory, and while these frames can be helpful in assessing Kincaid's work, the critic must ultimately realize that any label will be an inadequate definition for Kincaid's writings.

As to the still unresolved question about the autobiographical nature of her work, the answer must be that while Kincaid draws upon life experiences, she also draws upon the stories of her community. It is impossible to distinguish between which events actually happened to the author, which events were witnessed by the author, and which events were relayed to her from the mother or from ancient oral histories of Antigua. Really, though, the origin of the stories is not important. What matters is the interpretation and analysis Kincaid brings to the telling of

the stories. It is not the event itself, but, the creation and re-creation of the event that should concern the reader.

Kincaid's indomitable critique of the Western philosophies which lead equally to colonialism and white feminism figures prominently in all of her books, creating a tension that does not find resolution. Her angle of vision as colonized subject is keener than that of the colonizers, allowing her to gain knowledge that eludes the oppressors.

As Kincaid's characters seek their individual identities, it is not in the "rugged individualist" tradition of Western thought. Kincaid's female characters seek to invent unique selves, but they do so while retaining their connections with others. Although the daughters seek to separate from their mothers, they are also gratified to realize that such a separation cannot ever be complete. Connection to the mother and to one's home is an essential part of one's identity and existence.

Future Research

In determining the emergence of voice and identity, one could also look toward Kincaid's other books. Each of Kincaid's books is written in a different style, yet each is dependent on the others. Each book acts as a signifier for the previous and subsequent books. Individual threads of meaning weave through the various narratives, so that stories begin to sound familiar as the reader becomes acquainted with each supervenient narrative.

Though Annie John and Lucy were the principle foci of this research, Kincaid's first book, At the Bottom of the River is a dynamic, polyphonic, exhilarating collection of essays which easily lends itself to a similar study. At the Bottom of the River is reflexive in its use of mirrors and images to suggest a metaphor for the book itself. If the reflections in the river, the mirrors, and the shadows all reflect the speaker, so then does the text of the book itself. Understanding the book then means understanding the context of Antiguan political, social, and familial realities.

To use Ngugi's metaphor, At the Bottom of the River "moves the centre," and creates a site of resistance which strains the Western-trained ear. The book is a surrealistic dreamscape in which Kincaid decimates certain universal "truths." A reader accustomed to the British text with its predictable plot, characterization, scene, language, and themes must be prepared for a radical departure from convention.

A Small Place differs in style from Kincaid's other books. Rather than a novel, the book is a polemic directed toward the tourists whom she regards as continuing the legacy of colonialism. A Small Place delivers a scathing and uncompromising critique of colonialism and neo-colonialism in her home island of Antigua. Throughout the book she delineates examples of the disastrous effects of

colonialism, including fiascos such as the corruption of the government, the invasion by foreigners, the harmful influence of capitalism, and the decay of ill-maintained British-style buildings.

While Ngugi and Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin claim that postcolonial writers are thwarted from fully realizing their anti-imperialist potential, Kincaid disproves them by her direct oppositional stance against oppression and imperialism. She bravely exposes the "debacle" of her country's government both during and since colonial times, unyielding in her assignment of blame. To the tourist she says, "you must accept that it is mostly your fault."

Each of these books provides an unique look at the emerging voice and identity of women in the context of neo-colonialism. Because they are so different in style, they would be interesting to study for their comparisons and differences. Each approaches the similar theme of anti-imperialism and individual identity, yet each does so in a vastly different way.

The themes of spirituality in Kincaid's work, including the belief in dreams and superstitions, the comparisons of Obeah to Christianity, and the pervasive influence of Obeah traditions are also important to the theme of emergent voice and identity in the neo-colonial experience. Obeah is the final link to the homeland, because many rituals which women

consider crucial to survival depend upon the availability of specific plants and herbs.

Several critics have applied the concepts of Kristeva and Irigaray to Kincaid's writings. Roni Natov, Laura Niesen de Abruna, Eleanor Ty, and Giovanni Covi all refer to terms first introduced by these psychoanalytic theorists. Roni Natov summarizes the relevant work of Kristeva and Irigaray: "They attempt to restore what they believe our culture has repressed in men and women: the body of the mother." She explains that the pre-linguistic stages of language are experienced through the mother:

What Kristeva calls the 'semiotic' or the creation of meaning through pre-verbal modalities--rhythm, intonation, gesture, melody--is associated with the infants' intense attachment to and experience of the world through the mother's body. (3)

Kincaid distinctly describes her communication with her mother as existing through the body. This corresponds with Kristeva's theory as being uniquely feminine and without symbolic order. Lucy says,

I could hear her voice, and she spoke to me not in English or the French patois that she sometimes spoke, or in any language that needed help from the tongue; she spoke to me in language anyone female could understand. (90)

Lucy shares a language with her mother which cannot even be explained in words. Covi defines this amorphous style of communication as "feminine language: the nurse's language of sounds and silences which stands before and beyond the rational signifying words of the father" (348). Though it

is defined as pre-lingual communication, it is described by Lucy as being more powerful than the language of words.

Annie also relies on pre-lingual communication, such as when she watches her mother's mouth "as it opened and closed over words, or as she laughed" (22). Natov says that she watches "her mother's mouth create meaning in the pre-verbal language of the semiotic" (7). Natov also contends that the ritual of bathing together connects mother and daughter: "This act of spiritual bonding represents Annie's entry into an exclusive, female world and affirms her primal intimacy with her mother" (4). The daughter's close identification with the mother is expressed through this non-verbal language.

Also, the novels and stories of other Caribbean women, such as Jean Rhys, Michelle Cliff, Velma Pollard, and Paule Marshall, deal with similar issues of identity and separation in the neo-colonial context. In her interview with Selwyn Cudjoe, Kincaid herself claimed that she was surprised when she discovered the existence of other Caribbean writers. Their works have received very little attention, but many of the women writers from Caribbean nations have produced imaginative, powerful works which are excellent examples of resistance to the British canon of literature.

And certainly Kincaid's next book, An Autobiography of My Mother, will supplement much of the work within this

thesis, and will contribute to an understanding of Kincaid's work. The title suggests that the book will continue to deal with issues of voice and identity, especially as these issues relate to a young woman's relationship with her mother.

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