

DISSIMULATING WOMEN: JAMAICA KINCAID'S *ANNIE JOHN* AND
AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MY MOTHER

By

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Critics of Jamaica Kincaid have often overlooked her radical contribution to identity politics in Caribbean literature. They argue that her writing does not have the same desire or potential to resist colonialism that scholars see in the larger community of Caribbean writers. They say that novels such as *Annie John* are apolitical or ahistorical because of Kincaid's close focus on domestic issues. They argue that such novels as *Autobiography of My Mother* do not acknowledge her responsibility to her Caribbean homeland, the Caribbean community, or to history, and that her style is too classically influenced or influenced by a Euro-centric postmodernism. However, Kincaid is contesting these concepts as the grounds on which Caribbean writers theorize their subjectivity or agency. Caribbean writers have worked toward a decolonized definition of Caribbeanness by placing a redefined nation—which history, community, family and heritage all work to support—at the center of their resistance. Kincaid's writing suggests that an allegiance to an oppressive community and nation can hurt the individual and can

propagate unending cycles of oppression unless the individual is also able to redefine her relationship with the community. Because Kincaid challenges the existing paradigm for resistance literature, Caribbean scholars have not recognized her intervention. Yet, her writing is deceptively revolutionary, and her heroines depict an agency that is unmatched in many Caribbean novels. The subtle success of her resistance calls for a re-evaluation of Kincaid's writing, and the precepts by which critics have judged her potential to resist.

Since critics have questioned her take on the key concepts of the individual, community, and nation in theories of resistance, this thesis will survey criticism about these concepts. I will compare Kincaid's reception to that of Michelle Cliff, a writer who is dealing with issues similar to Kincaid's, but who is more accepted by the critical community. I will reconcile the positions on the above concepts and clarify how Kincaid's engagement of these concepts demonstrates the usefulness of postmodernism for Caribbean writing. Because Caribbean nationalism rises out of modernist thinking, commonly accepted constructions of national space position the community and the individual in a hierarchical relationship and compel individuals to support the community, regardless of the community's support for them. Kincaid's writing, however, redefines these relationships as she successfully creates characters that interrogate meta-narratives such as community from a standpoint staked out by their individual agency. Her writing is both postmodern and revolutionary.

CHAPTER 1
“CYAAN LIVE SPLIT”: AN OLD MOLD AND KINCAID’S INTERVENTION

The time will come for both of us to choose. For we will have to make the choice.
Cast our lot. Cyaan live split. Not in this world.

-Michelle Cliff, *No Telephone to Heaven*

I refused to belong to a race, I refused to accept a nation. I wanted only, and still
do want, to observe people who do so. The crime of these identities, which I know
now more than ever, I do not have the courage to bear. Am I nothing, then? I do
not believe so, but if nothing is a condemnation, then I would love to be
condemned.

-Kincaid, *Autobiography of My Mother*

Critics of Jamaica Kincaid have often overlooked her radical contribution to identity politics in Caribbean literature. They argue that her writing does not have the same desire or potential to resist colonialism that scholars see in the larger community of Caribbean writers. They say that novels such as *Annie John* are apolitical or ahistorical because of Kincaid’s close focus on domestic issues. They argue that such novels as *Autobiography of My Mother* do not acknowledge her responsibility to her Caribbean homeland, the Caribbean community, or to history, and that her style is too classically influenced or influenced by a Euro-centric postmodernism. However, Kincaid is contesting these concepts as the grounds on which Caribbean writers theorize their subjectivity or agency. Caribbean writers have worked toward a decolonized definition of Caribbeanness by placing a redefined nation—which history, community, family and heritage all work to support—at the center of their resistance. Kincaid’s writing suggests that an allegiance to an oppressive community and nation can hurt the individual and can

propagate unending cycles of oppression unless the individual is also able to redefine her relationship with the community. Because she challenges this existing paradigm for resistance literature, Caribbean scholars have not recognized her intervention. Yet, her writing is deceptively revolutionary, and her heroines depict an agency that is unmatched in many Caribbean novels. The subtle success of her resistance calls for a re-evaluation of Kincaid's writing, and the precepts by which critics have judged her potential to resist.

Properly evaluating the potential for resistance in Jamaica Kincaid's writing requires redefining the above key concepts in theories of resistance. In *Writing in Limbo*, Simon Gikandi suggests that Caribbean modernism can only overturn colonial modernist ideology when authors create a "national space." Michelle Cliff and the other authors that Gikandi introduces re-negotiate how this national space is constructed, actively revising outdated essentialized constructs of "the nation." Nevertheless, I will argue that the resulting constructions of national space still position the community and the individual in a hierarchical relationship, where individuals are expected to support the community, regardless of the community's support for them. Kincaid's writing redefines community as she successfully creates characters that interrogate meta-narratives such as community from a standpoint staked out by their individual agency.

These characters embody what Patricia Mann calls an *engaged individual*, an individual who has the agency to assess her own needs and create social contracts in communities where those needs will be met (Mann 141).¹ I will use *community* to suggest

¹Indeed, some of the strangeness of rethinking the role of the individual in the national community may stem from the twin birth of the concepts of *individual* and *nation* within European discourses of modernity (Mann 20). It may be impossible to think about the individual without inviting the modernist responsibilities to the nation to haunt the word. The term also suffers the baggage of humanist universalism that posits the individual subject as central to an empirically verifiable universe. I will use Patricia Mann's term engaged individual in order to accommodate ideal individuals who seek perfect information about the

any collection of individuals who are subject to a shared set of rules, expectations, or narratives. While the nation is a community that an engaged individual might consent to membership within, she might find a more exclusive community more helpful to her, or she may assent to identify herself with several different communities that support her agency. Because I do not want to contribute to the tendency to privilege the national community—the nation—over smaller communities, I will use *community* to refer to any community, including a national community.

Because the national community has been instrumental in some of the gains that resistance work has seen, Kincaid's refusal to negotiate community or national space before establishing personal security is misinterpreted as selfish or a hopeless last resort. Her attention to the needs of the individual leads critics to call her style postmodern, which for them, constitutes one more reason that her writing seems to fail to resist colonialism. Their outright rejection of postmodernism is partly owing to misunderstandings in how postmodern philosophy and style has been interpreted. As postmodernism interrogates the theoretical and cultural positions that Gikandi and others see as *essential* to defeating colonial modernism, critics suggest that it is apolitical and ahistorical. In distinction, this thesis will argue that Kincaid's postmodernism is political and is instrumental in her successful rejection of colonial oppression. In order to see the potential for resistance in Kincaid's writing, postmodernism must be reevaluated in the context of Caribbean literature.

Postmodernism can be loosely understood as a style of the representation arts that evolved out of modernism and is characterized by pastiche, fragmentation, and

responsibilities that operate within a nation or subset community and who possess perfect agency to choose or change a nation or community that fits their best interests.

fabrication (Wolfreys 611). Although the nation and community lose *a priori* legitimacy under postmodern deconstruction, leading critic Jane King to reject both postmodernism and Kincaid, Jean-Francois Lyotard suggests that postmodern deconstruction is political because it effectively resists the installation of the grand-narrative as the exclusive narrative of a community. For this paper, I will define postmodernism using Lyotard's suggestion that it is an "incredulity toward meta-narratives" (*Postmodern* xxiv).

Though I have outlined my position on these important concepts, it is important to look at how Caribbean writers and critics have dealt with them, and how that might influence their judgment of Kincaid. Critic Simon Gikandi wrote *Writing in Limbo* in which he suggests that Caribbean writers seem to be working through a response to European modernism. He identifies the writing of the contemporary era as Caribbean modernism and outlines what he identifies as modernist Caribbean writers' goals:

My basic premise, then, is that Caribbean writers cannot adopt the history and culture of European modernism, especially as defined by the colonizing structures, but neither can they escape from it because it has overdetermined Caribbean cultures in many ways. Moreover, for peoples of African and Asian descent, the central categories of European modernity— history, national language, subjectivity—have value only when they are fertilized by figures of the 'other' imagination which colonialism has sought to repress. In this sense, Caribbean modernism is highly revisionary. As Wilson Harris, possibly the most self-conscious Caribbean modernist, has argued, *modern*, "implies an ongoing and unceasing re-visionary and innovative strategy that has its roots in the deepest layers of that past that still address us." (Gikandi 3)

From Gikandi's summative statement about the purposes and techniques of Caribbean modernist writers, we can chart out a few expectations for writers of Caribbean literature that is to be understood as conscientious of the need for increased agency: First, they are neither able to adopt western modernist discourse or escape from it. Second, history, national language and subjectivity are picked out as the central categories of modernism,

and this is how Gikandi seems to describe the relationship between the individual, the community, and the nation. Third, Caribbean writers who discuss these concepts to varying degrees re-insert or naturalize figures from their repressed African and Indigenous cultural past. The final expectation seems to be that Caribbean writers should invoke concepts of individual, community and nation and should do it in a way that looks to the “deepest layers of the past”—previous literature has placed the beginning with Columbus or the birth of the island.² This past becomes used in Gikandi’s model to explore how history affects the Caribbean today, and to find figures and concepts that can be naturalized into use to forge a new community and nation, re-visioned.

Critics’ praise for Michelle Cliff exposes the assumptions that they bring to their readings of Caribbean literature about the responsibility of the individual to the community. Although Cliff’s light skin and lesbianism make Caribbean nationalist critics that rigidly pin Caribbeanness to blackness or heterosexuality sometimes hesitant to accept Cliff’s writing as a viable model, her writing is increasingly being read in classrooms outside of the Caribbean as well as within. *Writing in Limbo* by Simon Gikandi presents Michelle Cliff’s *Abeng* as an example of postcolonial writing in the Caribbean that gains subjectivity and leaves room for other Caribbean voices (Gikandi 251). In his conclusion, he forwards Cliff’s writing as an example of how he sees Caribbean subjectivity developing out of Caribbean modernism. The following section discusses Cliff’s novel, *No Telephone to Heaven*, the sequel to *Abeng*. I outline how

² Gikandi discusses writers who have re-visioned the beginning of history in the Caribbean as an intervention into modernism. Although Western modernist discourse places the beginning of history at the time of Columbus trips to the Caribbean, Edward Kamau Brathwaite in his writing has emphasized the geological birth of the island to pose a new beginning. Cliff intertextually acknowledges the repositioning of “pre-history” in history in *Abeng* (Gikandi 238).

critics have found useful her writing about concepts such as nationalism, community, and feminism and then outline why these approaches to these concepts might be limiting.

Cliff's main character, Clare, is a light skinned Jamaican of African, English and Arawak heritage. After years of living in the United States and England, she moves back to Jamaica where she identifies with her mother's line, her black heritage, and researches and teaches a re-visioned history that she hopes will help the children of Jamaica become more aware of the ideological baggage that the colonial history books bring with them.³ After meditating on the poor living conditions of many children in Jamaica, she feels compelled to do more, so she joins a guerilla group which stages an attack on a film set that romanticizes the figure of Nanny of the Maroons, a runaway slave and folk-hero of Jamaica who led other run-away slaves to resist British attempts to recapture them. The plot of the film is a twisted version of history that shows Cudjoe, another maroon leader, saving Nanny from the forest spirit Sasabonsam, a version that aims to overwrite Nanny's African folk-hero status as a leader in the resistance to colonialism. The group is betrayed, and the military counterattacks, shooting and killing Clare.

Clare's allegiance to the Nanny narrative that she protects defines the characteristics of resistance in the Caribbean in terms of Africanness and motherhood.

Cliff writes about Nanny in the "Magnanimous Warrior" section of *No Telephone to Heaven*, which finds its refrain in Nanny's motherly qualities and her warrior qualities:

Mother who carries the power-stone, center of the world. Warrior who places the blood-cloth on the back of the whipped slave. She who turns her attention to the evildoer. Mother who binds the female drumhead with parchment from a goat. Warrior who gathers grave-dirt in her pockets. Pieces of chalk. Packs of cards. Bits

³ For an interview with Michelle Cliff where she discusses her preference for "re-visioning" as opposed to "revising" or "revisionist" see Jim Clawson's interview with her for Nidus at the University of Pittsburgh 2002 at <http://www.pitt.edu/~nidus/archives/spring2002/cliff.html>

of looking-glass. Beaks. Feet. Bones of patoo. Teeth of dogs and alligators. Glass eyes. Sulfur. Camphor. Myrrh. Asafoetida. Frankincense. Curious shells. China dolls. Wooden images. She writes in her own blood across the drumhead. Obeah-woman. Myal-woman...She bites the evil-doers that they become full of sores, (164)

Cliff's representation of Nanny alternates her role as mother and warrior. Both of these roles are wrapped in African cultural allusions: her attention to the whipped slave and her own status as a runaway slave secure her role in an Afro-Caribbean consciousness. Although the position of this Afro-Caribbean mother warrior at the center does not necessarily exclude participation by other types of people, Clare finds herself reinscribing color categories in the resistance struggle as the narrator calls her an albino gorilla in the chapter "White Chocolate" (91). The image of the albino gorilla suggests that she is an exception to an otherwise recognizable category that defines the identity of the guerilla group as black or African. Clare's friend Harry/Harriet, who suggests in the first epigraph that he/she must choose, knows that his participation in the group requires that he/she keep his/her secret of transgenderedness to himself/herself, even though the descriptions of Nanny as mother never extol her biological motherhood, only her position as a nurturer. Though this list leaves room for Harry/Harriet, he/she feels like there is no room for his/her fragmented sexuality in the narrative of Nanny and the African past that the group adopts. Thus, the model of Caribbean woman as mother and nurturer to a community here represented by Cliff's characters makes it hard for critics to recognize the resistance of Xuela, the main character in *Autobiography of My Mother*, who does not embrace motherhood, and is more critical of those in her community.

As the themes of community and motherhood mark Cliff's writing as Caribbean, her writing style also is recognizable within the contexts of the Caribbean canon through

her use of intertextuality and parody. Intertextuality is a technique usually associated with postmodernism through which one text alludes to another text or the outside world.

Gikandi writes that Cliff's use of intertextuality characterizes her style as postmodern and places her within a community of Caribbean writers who also use intertextual techniques to create and acknowledge a community of Caribbean writers. Gikandi suggests that Cliff's inclusion of geographical history of the island in her own re-visioned history alludes to Edward Kamau Brathwaite's "Islands and Exiles" (Gikandi 238). In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Cliff also alludes to Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, and Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, itself a parody of Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*.⁴ As Cliff connects herself with these writers and texts, she makes her writing legible to critics by acknowledging a common textual heritage that she shares with these writers. This acknowledgement of other Caribbean writers is a stylistic technique that comes to be installed as a mold for Caribbean writing, as Kincaid is criticized for her unwillingness to acknowledge her cultural heritage founded on a community of writers.

In addition to creating community among writers, intertextuality in Caribbean writing serves political purposes. Even though critics such as Frederic Jameson argue that intertextual references to history that characterize postmodernist writing necessarily lose the context of that history and therefore produce narratives that are both ahistorical and apolitical, Gikandi emphasizes that parody in Caribbean writing serves to renegotiate the terms of the grand-narrative of European modernist discourse in light of a new Caribbean

⁴ Thanks to Leah Rosenberg for her help in identifying these intertextual connections.

nationalism.⁵ Cliff's list of items in the above quotation is an example of parody that strips away the power from a colonial modernist artifact of history, and enlists that colonial text in the project of restoring a repressed past with cultural power. The list refers to obeah paraphernalia printed in the *Sub-Officer's Guide of Jamaica* of 1908, and is quoted in a 1934 book *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica* by Joseph Williams, a Jesuit priest (Williams 103).⁶ The list of obeah paraphernalia reflects the fear that colonizing whites had of Afro-Caribbean culture. Its inclusion in Cliff's text indicates the ultimate powerlessness of western law to defeat a newly powerful Afro-Caribbean spirit built around Nanny. Rather than allowing European colonial texts to define Caribbean subjects unanswered, Cliff adopts these texts to show how they can be used to create knowledge about a hidden history, if one reads with a watchful eye, and is willing to read history against the grain. Cliff's narrative allows Nanny to regain the power of these *obeah* artifacts and installs her at the center ("carves the center-stone"), replacing the western Enlightenment rejection of Afro-Caribbean spirituality at the center of ethnocentric colonial texts. Though Caribbean individuals may have as their ultimate goal a desire to end the effects on the present of an unfair history, Cliff legitimates history's bid to organize the present, though she replaces European modernist values with Afro-Caribbean ones.

Thus, although Cliff uses postmodern techniques such as parody of colonial history and intertextuality, her aims for these techniques seek legitimation in grand-

⁵ In his *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Frederic Jameson argues that historical *pastiche* or intertextual connection of historical narratives creates empty signifiers of a time that alludes to history, but without the historical meaning. He argues that intertextuality is apolitical for this reason.

⁶ An internet search for the *obeah* items brings up an online version of Williams' book, available at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/afr/ppj/>

narratives. Rather than using intertextuality to always question historiography, the above discussion suggests that Cliff uses intertextual allusions to other Caribbean writers as a method of citation or authority. Her use of parody removes European centrality from modernist thinking and replaces it with Afro-Caribbean context. Although Cliff does mix the personal narrative in with history as a way to question how colonial historiography has ignored the individual, the reader feels as if Clare lives her life as an individual determined to evade the nightmare of history, yet being caught in the end. Linda Hutcheon, in her *Poetics of Postmodernism*, writes, “to elevate ‘private experience to public consciousness’ in postmodern historiographic metafiction is...to render inextricable the public and historical and the private and biographical” (Hutcheon 94). Hutcheon writes here of the necessity that the private writer will order the public world. But Cliff’s technique seems the opposite of this postmodern assumption because public discourse—nation and history—orders Clare’s private experience.

Even though Cliff uses parody and intertextuality, including the individual in making public history and foregrounding personal narrative, Clare makes concessions for a history that cannot contain her. She becomes entangled in a nationalist narrative, and eventually sacrifices herself to destroy a film version of history in defense of the Nanny narrative, thereby installing it as grand-narrative. Hutcheon continues: “among the many things that postmodern intertextuality challenges are both closure and single, centralized meaning” (Hutcheon 127). Whereas Clare begins her career as a historian by allowing her students to accept or resist her history—opening up the discourse to allow their individual viewpoints—the attack on the film set attempts to close down the Hollywood version of

history. Ironically, the attack only succeeds in closing down the personal narrative of Clare and the other guerilla soldiers.

The obliteration of the characters at the end of *No Telephone to Heaven* reinforces analysis such as Antonia MacDonald-Smythe's *Making Homes in the West/Indies* and Simon Gikandi's work on writing in exile that suggests Caribbean individuals can best situate themselves in the "national spaces" that they imagine from outside of their respective Caribbean nations. Cliff and the other writers that Gikandi studies write about the Caribbean from Europe or America and speak personally about the alienation they feel when they are away from the Caribbean, and the death that living in the Caribbean is for them. The earlier writers wrote about the Caribbean from metropolitan centers out of necessity, because there they had access to the resources that would facilitate their writing, and Cliff says she writes from America because her lesbianism would be rejected in the Caribbean. These limitations are also experienced by their characters, who do not fit in the Caribbean societies that the authors create for them. Although Caribbean communities have tried, with models of hybridity and creolization, to support the unique mixing that has occurred in them as a result of colonialism, community discourses (such as nationalist discourse) have often led to essentialized formulae of the qualities to be valued or have been founded on notions of the essence of a community.⁷

Belinda Edmondson praises Cliff's story for its community-making and sees the diverse group of individuals working together to create a new Jamaica as "empowering

⁷ Edward Kamau Brathwaite in *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* has argued that writers such as Jean Rhys cannot truthfully represent the situation of the Caribbean because she is a white creole (38). On the other hand, Edouard Glissant, in *Caribbean Discourse*, suggests that Caribbean culture is the essence of the Caribbean unconscious. While Glissant's notion of Caribbeanness seems less fixed, it is silent on a position from which the individual can negotiate her role in the community. Caribbeanness is essentialized as related to community values rather than individual ones.

the entire spectrum of people [in the Caribbean] and providing a means for all to participate in the discourse of shaping a West Indian identity.” She further explains that Clare’s attack on the film set is related to her search for history: “By blending the voice of the ‘official’ history, which denies that there is a history, with the oral transmission of historical resistance encoded in the ‘magical’ narrative of myth, the passage reveals historical representation in discourse to be the site of conflict” (Edmondson 178). She follows up her emphasis on representation: “In the final analysis, it is discourse which creates meaning; by creating an alternative ‘reality’ in a narrative structure which both extends and engages West Indian and European representations, the text attempts not an imaginary nor an imitation universe but a new kind of reality” (191). And her assessments that Cliff’s work promotes hope for community in a mixed Caribbean society, and effectively engages history on the ideological level are representative of the canon of writing on her.

In both *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*, Cliff’s position as an *author* allows her to re-vision history and narrative to support her individual subjectivity in the face of the larger Caribbean community and nation.⁸ That gain, however, is only in the plane of discourse—the advances in agency are mediated by the writer, Michelle Cliff, and understood by the reader.⁹ In the plane of events of the novel, her characters are often

⁸ For an interview with Michelle Cliff where she discusses her preference for “re-visioning” as opposed to “revising” or “revisionist” see Jim Clawson’s interview with her for *Nidus* at the University of Pittsburg 2002 at <http://www.pitt.edu/~nidus/archives/spring2002/cliff.html>

⁹ Here I adapt Bob Foss’ terminology of the plane of events and the plane of discourse. In his explication *Filmmaking: Narrative and Structural Techniques*, he writes that the plane of events describes everything that happens in the fictional world that the narrative tries to depict, and that phenomena in the plane of events can be perceived by the characters in that fictional world. On the other hand, he uses plane of discourse to describe those elements of a narrative that are imperceptible to the characters in the plane

unsure of themselves, and ultimately they are unable to effect change in their fragmented communities.¹⁰ In *No Telephone to Heaven*, they submit themselves completely to defend the history of the nation, but find that that history cannot protect them from the injustices in society. This fragmentation is lethal, as Clare is silenced by the very real (to her character) fragmentation that her body experiences from the machine gun spray of her own government. Admittedly, Clare and the guerillas were willing to accept death as a possibility of their attack, and their refusal to admit death as the ultimate defeat does effect resistance against the government narrative and my own suggestion that Kincaid's heroines are more effective. But untimely death cuts short the ability of the guerillas to continue creating narratives that intervene in oppression, and even Cliff's own choice to write suggests that she finds more resistance in her ability to tell narratives than Clare's willingness to die for a particular narrative. Though Edmondson suggests that it would be wrong to conclude that the world Cliff creates to express a less-fragmented self through her writing of *No Telephone to Heaven* is not *real*, it is important to note that Cliff's freedom does not transfer to Clare. The main character of the book is dead and the sounds of the Jamaican forest and birds have the last word *in the novel*.

of events, but that create meaning for the viewer (Foss 2). For this paper, I will refer to the actions and knowledge of the characters, and the events in the narrative of the novel as happening on the plane of events. Those phenomena and meanings that are unknown by the characters of the novel, and are instead reserved for the author of the novel or for the reader, I will refer to as existing on the plane of discourse.

¹⁰For discussion of the ultimate inefficiency of the characters in *No Telephone to Heaven*, and the effectiveness of Cliff's "rhetorical posture" and creativity to "write herself into belonging," see Antonia MacDonald-Smythe *Making Homes in the West/Indies: Constructions of Subjectivity in the writings of Michelle Cliff and Jamaica Kincaid*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc. 2001. p 89 and Constance Richards'. "Nationalism and the Development of Identity in Postcolonial Fiction: Zoe Witcomb and Michelle Cliff." *Research in African Literatures* 36.1 (2005): 25-33.

In contrast, Kincaid's characters in *Annie John* and *Autobiography of My Mother* effect change within the plane of events of the novel; in effect, Kincaid's *characters* assume the author's narrative responsibility for creating the plane of discourse for their own stories. It is not apparent that Kincaid is mediating as Annie and Xuela relate their stories to the reader of these novels. This distinction is not to say that Kincaid's heroines do not engage discourse or narratives within their experienced plane of events. In fact, they never hesitate to draw on history or question colonial ideology. Their attention to micropolitical action and consequent ability to renegotiate their roles in the community and family allows them to take the resistance narrative to a new level of efficacy. Kincaid is able to create in her heroines a model of local resistance and agency where Cliff can only model an ideological subjectivity that requires the author's position outside the plane of events of the Jamaica of her novels. Kincaid's model might serve as a model for readers and other individuals in the Caribbean—and beyond—who wish to gain agency. In a discourse where writing has often been *about* the Caribbean, with Caribbean individuals having so often been spoken for, Annie's and Xuela's ability to succeed on the plane of events without an outside author-ity's intercession is a quality to appreciate.¹¹

In the second epigraph above, Xuela, the main character of *Autobiography of My Mother* refuses to belong to a race or nation, demonstrating that Kincaid is questioning old models of constructing Caribbean identity based on community and hybridity.

Looking critically at narratives of the community allows Xuela and Annie to assess the

¹¹ The plane of discourse and the plane of events do suffer from a hierarchical positioning in this argument. This paper will argue that the plane of discourse always has the upper hand as soon as it secures narrative power. I hope to explicate the method through which authors and individuals can secure the narrative power to orders events.

ways that the community can hurt and help them, but Kincaid's characters' criticism is often misunderstood as insulting to a community that has been victimized by colonialism.¹² A closer look at *Autobiography of My Mother* and *Annie John* will suggest that Kincaid does not criticize the usefulness of a community, or the desire to create community; Kincaid's characters both find help in community and work to nurture community on their own terms. But they also recognize that Caribbean communities are affected greatly by colonialism, and that individuals can allow themselves to be victimized by their communities. Kincaid's heroines refuse to replace the monolithic power of dominant discourse with a monolithic discourse of Caribbeanness that prescribes how the individual should think about categories such as race, community and history.

Kincaid's writing departs from Gikandi's stipulations while satisfying his goal to increase subjectivity. She *has* escaped the prescribed arena of conflict set by modernist ideas of the nation: rather than restricting herself to changing the content of the categories set by modernist discourse, she is working through the validity of the nation to herself and her responsibility to it and her community. It is her engagement with both colonial discourse and the national discourse that is its heir that makes her position indeterminate and illegible to critics. Her indeterminacy leads critics to call her postmodern. My argument posits that the success of Kincaid's heroines stems from this postmodern indeterminability which critics discount.

¹² In *Annie John*, Annie chooses to emigrate at the end of the novel, but her emigration is different from Clare's forced emigration to the United States, and different from Lamming's G. who emigrates to redefine himself and Caribbeanness. Annie has already emerged victorious from her identity confusion, and leaving the island is a pragmatic choice.

In order to present why postmodernism should be reconsidered as a means for Caribbean writers and individuals to achieve the agency that critics think modernism will eventually provide, I must first outline why they think postmodernism does not have this potential. In his discussion of *Abeng* and postmodernism, Gikandi suggests that Cliff and other Caribbean modernist writers borrow from postmodern technique only to engage Western modernist discourse, but stop short of opening up the Caribbean discourse to the indeterminability commonly sought in postmodern discourses (Gikandi 233). So while Gikandi seeks to re-vision the categories of individual and nation, the literature he reviews in *Writing in Limbo* does little in the way of rethinking the validity of these categories. Gikandi's conclusion sheds some light on why Caribbean writers might think postmodern ideology less relevant for their purposes than the style that writers like Cliff have adopted. He confirms that commonly in the Caribbean, writers use postmodern techniques "to subvert institutionalized history; but, on the other hand, these writers are striving to establish an authoritative Caribbean narrative of history" (Gikandi 232).

Though Gikandi does not claim that Cliff's modernist writing is the zenith of resistance literature in the Caribbean, and although postmodernism seeks to define the relationship of the individual with such narratives as nation as it abandons grand-narratives, Gikandi quickly dismisses the utility of a postmodernist approach to writing in the Caribbean:

My basic assumption is that before we deal with the "post" we have to interrogate its antecedent from all possible theoretical and cultural positions. And while it is not my intention to salvage the battered reputation of modernism in this book, I share Houston Baker's conviction that for black people confined by racism and colonialism in the Americas, the articulation of a "modernized" black or African national space represented through the arts has provided "a domain of hope and an arena of possible progress." It could be that many of the claims being made for the postmodern are sustained by a previous theory of the modern which is blind to the

discourses on identity and history which I have recentered in this book. (Gikandi 255)

Gikandi stipulates that the formulation of a black or African *national space* will free the individual from the confinement of racism, an appeal to legitimation by blackness and Africanness. His book sees some success as writers create subject-positions that better approximate the diverse collection of matter, thoughts and feelings that comprise individuals in the Caribbean. But the resolution of *No Telephone to Heaven* depicts death as the consequence of resistance, and dead ends are the natural conclusion of resistance writing that struggles to keep together the fragments of Caribbean society, holding to grand-narratives. These paradigms for resistant Caribbean literature lack a non-essentializing solution to the problem of fragmentation of individuals, communities, and nations in the plane of events. Gikandi continues to discuss patterns of legitimation in Caribbean modernist writing:

Whereas western novelists have acquiesced to Jean-Francois Lyotard's definition of the postmodern 'as incredulity toward grand-narratives,' and have even succumbed to the premise that the great narrative function is 'losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal,' many Caribbean writers seem to use postmodern narrative techniques to affirm the continuing urgency of an oppositional history and discourse that strive for the status of a grand narrative. Indeed, for writers such as Cliff the narrative of history in the Caribbean is legitimized by the writer's appeal to a repressed Afro-Caribbean historical consciousness (Gikandi 233).

Although Jean-François Lyotard's model of community as a local phenomenon would help complex Caribbean individuals gain subjectivity without pledging allegiance to concepts such as the Nanny myth for the sake of legitimation, Gikandi quickly

essentializes and dismisses his argument and postmodernism. Using arguments about postmodernism such as Gikandi's, critics of Kincaid are able to reject her postmodern aesthetic, even though she shares with these critics and writers the desire to gain subjectivity for the oppressed individual. Kincaid engages the narratives of community, individual, nation, and the narratives by which nation defines itself—history and heritage. Kincaid's refusal to project a clean-cut narrative of individual and nation frustrates critics, but where Cliff's characters did not meet with success on the plane of events, Kincaid's did. And where Gikandi's assumptions are based on the inability of individuals to escape modernist overdeterminations of culture and the effect of a colonial modernist past on individuals, Kincaid refuses to participate in communities that enact colonial violence. Her process of maintaining subjectivity is elucidated by Lyotard's postmodernism as both seek to define a new relationship between the individual and the grand-narratives that make up the world around her.¹³

Although the relevance of this French philosopher of postmodernism to the Caribbean has been ignored or discounted, Lyotard's writings provide the method for a critique of Caribbean nationalist thought that elucidates the significance of Kincaid's writing. I will be adapting two of his concepts to this argument. The first is the concept of the narrative cloud, which will serve as a way to reconceptualize the larger concept of

¹³ The meta-narratives that concern Lyotard the most in "Lessons in Paganism" and *The Postmodern Condition* are the nation or state and the corporate world, although he engages others in other works and lays the groundwork to call into question any grand-narrative. The grand-narratives of state and the corporate world do apply to writing in the Caribbean as both the nation and corporate interests compromise agency of the individual in the Caribbean. One of the biggest problems in the Caribbean, corruption, is a marker that these grand-narratives are working together to ensure oppression. Evidence of this is Clare's choice to execute an attack on the Hollywood film set to constitute an attack on hegemony. That the government construes an attack on the film set as an attack on public interests suggests that the government is in league with corporate interests.

hybridity. The second is the concept of pagan narrative pragmatics, which will outline a mode of approaching discourse and everyday relationships.

In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Lyotard argues that postmodernism is, simply put, “incredulity toward meta-narratives.” He uses the term *meta-narrative* to refer to those narratives that a society turns to in order to legitimate such phenomena as language, ideas, or actions, but which are not expected to be subject to legitimation themselves. He suggests that thinkers who draw on grand-narratives to gain knowledge will be left with conclusions that are dependent on the premises of the grand-narratives and that reinscribe the power of the system under which the knowledge was born. He argues that rather than think of ourselves as individuals put upon or called to act on behalf of grand-narratives, we should think of ourselves existing at the intersection of an ever-expanding universe of narrative clouds, each cloud possessing its own universe of rules (*Postmodern* xxiv).

To begin, we might think of “the nation” as a narrative cloud with its own rules or poetics. Lyotard writes that postmodernism sees these clouds being dispersed. Thus, we might think of the reality of the division between the guerilla group and the Jamaican government and military—both representatives of the nation, but now placed in opposition as they both claim to be defending the nation’s interests. This dispersion is activated and sustained by the work of individuals to create a progression away from grand-narratives that are inherently ill-fitting because they are generated by the necessary gap between signifier and signified. It is the role of these individuals to create narratives that are more suitable, by pirating the power of the existing narratives.¹⁴ But Lyotard

¹⁴ It is interesting to note that because of the responsibility of the individual in dispersing narratives and creating more suitable ones, Lyotard’s postmodernism is quite the opposite of the caricature of the

notes that these new clouds of narrative as well have “pragmatic valencies” that are structured and specific to the contract undertaken by its participants. It was such a “valency” that made Harry/Harriet’s and Cliff’s choice a matter of pragmatics. Their community had an understanding about the rules that comprised it—skin color didn’t matter, as long as the aesthetic of the group was based on African cultural figures, and sex didn’t matter as long as the individuals adhered to heterosexual discourse. But regardless, at least for the member of the group that betrayed them, individual desires interfered. The group ignored the importance of the individual and assumed that everyone was making the necessary sacrifices for the community.

In essence, Lyotard’s philosophy places the responsibility of adherence to or resistance to these narratives on the individual, and suggests that an individual ignores her subjectivity to narratives to her doom. The group’s resistance to the government’s narrative was obvious and dramatic, but their manner of resisting might have been more effective had it been less obvious as Kincaid’s *Annie John*. According to Lyotard, postmodernism asks subjects to pay attention to the pragmatic tendencies of whichever cloud of discourse in which they are going to partake so that they can anticipate the “rules” of the system and work for their own best interests with understanding and intent. Alternately, they can join a different narrative cloud (keeping in mind that clouds are permeable—they may choose to participate in more than one) or form a new narrative cloud. That is not to say that the tendencies or rules will be transparent or that any narrative will allow an individual to experience a “true” narrative that aligns signifier and signified. But the difference is that one can better approximate and manipulate his world

postmodern subject walking around with her head in the clouds, at play with words and incognizant of the material realities on the ground.

if it can be divided up into smaller worlds that can be micromanaged with a more awareness of the rules and discriminating precision.

Lyotard's cloud analogy is relevant to the field of Caribbean literature as a way to re-envision the work that theorists have done with discussions of hybridization or creolization—usually understood as the linguistic, cultural or genetic mixing of European, African, Indigenous, or Asian heritage. I see in Lyotard's description of clouds of narratives the same resistance to any grand-narrative that defines the composition of nation or the heritage and history it stipulates. The complexity of Caribbean society cannot possibly be approximated with such broad categories, so the concept of clouds opens up the concept of hybridization to other fields of narrative outside of ethnicity, such as sexual agency, and to competing narratives within those narratives. The Caribbean has for a long time recognized competition between European, African and indigenous cultural narratives in the debate over creolization, which has been both promoted and vilified. Edouard Glissant discusses the debate in his article, "Cross-Cultural Poetics." He argues against those who would claim that any mixing of cultures is to be avoided because it leads to deculturalization. Rather, Glissant suggests that nationalism based on purity of culture is a western concept and illusionary (Glissant 141). He argues that a cross-cultural poetics cannot be defined, but only recognized (Glissant 142). A definition of cross-cultural poetics was upheld to the detriment of the guerilla group when they focused their efforts on the defense of the Afro-Caribbean figure of Nanny the Maroon, suggesting that the composition of the nation depended on Afro-Caribbean folk narrative. Even that folk narrative is plagued by fragmentation as the betrayal of the guerilla soldiers reinscribes the betrayal of Nanny by her war chief Quao

who agreed to a treaty with the British even though he knew that she did not want to surrender.

Glissant argues against a solidified definition of creolization, suggesting that it is instead “the accumulation of the commonplace and the clarification of related obscurity, creolization is the unceasing process of transformation” (Glissant 142). It is important to note that Glissant rejected notions of the primacy of the individual in favor of the primacy of a national unconscious, Glissant’s definition of creolization has the commonplace, the importance of utility of the history that is incorporated (“clarification of *related* obscurity”) and change at the heart of it. Even for Glissant’s hybridity, Clare’s wearing a cotta, a rolled up cloth placed on top of her head to cushion it from the weight of vegetables she had to carry to market, might seem impractical. Kincaid’s characters’ utilization of history seems less overt because she resists invoking historical “artifacts.” Though Cliff makes reference to the historical fact that female slaves would abort their children so that they would not suffer under slavery, the inclusion of this piece of “history” seems so relevant and *useful* to Kincaid’s Xuela so as to not seem like “history.”

As Lyotard rejects fixed notions of community and nation, he also rejects stipulations about *a priori* responsibility of the individual to the community and nation. Glissant suggests that the commonplace needs to be at the heart of understanding of hybridity. Lyotard posits narrative pragmatics as a way to deal with the everyday demands for response that grand-narratives, communities and individuals place on other individuals. In Kincaid’s success with this method lies her intervention into Caribbean literature. It is the theory behind the smartness of Xuela’s and Annie’s behavior and

explains why Clare's behavior is doomed. Lyotard's discussion of narrative pragmatics suggests a method of approaching action and speech that will be the foundation of my argument that a free society should be founded on the responsibility of individuals to only participate in narratives of nation and culture when those narratives will work to enact their own motivations and desires.¹⁵

Although agency is often calculated as the ability of individuals to offer their dissent against a larger power, be it a family, community, or national government, Lyotard argues in his article "Lessons in Paganism" that merely offering dissent on a particular policy or action traps the dissenter because the individual accepts the power structure that allows the policy to take place. Even though she offers some resistance, she resists in the way that is allowed to her by this power structure. He takes as his premise that power structures evolve to limit the ability of dissenters both to recognize wrongs in the system and to right those wrongs within the system. Though systems do often allow opportunities for individuals to voice dissent in ways that allow them to blow off steam, they evolve to prevent the opportunity to dissent in any way that will compromise the system. He argues that any victimization that the system enacts on an individual occurs only because the system was able to trick the individual into letting her guard down. In other words, we often make gods of men or institutions when we would be better served to recognize their narratives as the bids for power over us that they are, and then strategize ways to look like we are participating within the system while working to

¹⁵ Lyotard's writing is both frustratingly dense and sublimely poetic at the same time. In addition, his essay is written as a Socratic dialogue to constantly remind his reader that it is above all his own story—not theory—that the reader approaches. Although I would love to quote him at length, the two aforementioned factors make direct quotations awkward to integrate and analyze in standard essay form. Even though I know I cannot do justice to the insight or the multifaceted concepts he presents, I will limit my use of direct quotations and offer instead my own summary of his argument.

compromise its power by creating our own alternative discourses. In essence, Lyotard argues that resistance should happen outside of a system, because resistance within a system is bound to fail and be reincorporated into the system.

To support this argument, he analyzes the pragmatics of the narrative—where narrative pragmatics describe analyzing who is driving the action in a situation and how that control can be maintained or usurped—and outcomes of two Greek myths: the story of Arachne’s tapestry and Diana’s pursuit by Actaeon. In one story, Arachne boasts that she weaves most beautifully, thus inviting a challenge from the goddess Pallas to a weaving contest. They each weave a tapestry. Pallas weaves scenes describing the metamorphoses of humans that the gods dole as punishment for being too clever. Arachne takes the same subject, metamorphosis, but re-visions the theme to depict gods metamorphosing to take advantage of humans. Although the weaving was thought to be of equal skill, Pallas became frustrated at Arachne’s accusation of the gods and turned her into a spider. Lyotard argues that although Arachne was able to outwit the goddess, she could not overpower her. Because of Pallas’ superior power, she was able to incorporate Arachne into her tapestry, thus winning the game of narrative pragmatics by becoming the narrator of Arachne’s story. Lyotard argues that Arachne is drawn into the “story” that Pallas tells about her own ability to behave fairly in a contest presumed to be conducted on the merits of the women’s weaving. She reacts to this story, forgetting that the gods do not have to play fairly. Arachne is manipulated and her resistance to the goddess neutralized (“Lessons” 138).¹⁶

¹⁶ It should be noted that Lyotard does admit that the spider has continued to weave webs where the gods are extinct. This staying power of the spider is interesting to compare to the stories of Anansi, the trickster spider god of Afro-Caribbean folktales, who is able to continue weaving stories because of the tendency of

The story of Arachne offers another explanation behind Clare's inability to complete her mission. She naively believes first, in the primacy of the Nanny stories she has come to recognize as history, and second in her ability to change her subjectivity by contesting the narrative of history that developed alongside of it. She ignores the fact that even though narratives of history work to uphold a western worldview, these narratives only serve as a distraction from the problem of subjectivity that keeps the Jamaican people poor and hungry. Rather than Clare preserving her own ability to exist despite narratives of the guerilla group or mocking representations of history, Clare feels compelled to defend her version of the Nanny story thus acknowledging the power history has over her. Her resistance only angers the government who maintains power ultimately regardless of what the history books say. Clare has limited the arena for her resistance to the arena of the historical narrative, the importance of which is stipulated by western modernism itself. Her action is a "reaction" which Lyotard argues only draws the individual into the position of the narrated where the narrative being told is told by western modernism about its dominance of her. Western modernist discourse is only mastered and made into the *narrated* on the level of the novel, which after all is written by Cliff.

Despite his assertion that resistance must happen in a way that is outside the surveillance of the power-structure, Lyotard suggests that there is a way to achieve justice within a society. He uses the narrative of the Greek goddess Diana and Actaeon to argue that an individual can maintain her safety by recognizing interpellation and strategizing a response that will allow the interpellating narrator to think that she is acting out his

the listeners to believe and be fooled. Whereas the spider in Lyotard's story merely survives, Anansi survives *and* resists by maintaining power.

narrative, thus seducing him out of his element, which gives control of the narrative to her. Actaeon the hunter encountered Diana while she was bathing and fell in love with her. She ran and he followed her with his hunting dogs chasing as well. She even turned herself into a deer to make the hunter confident in his hunt. As he and the dogs closed in on Diana, confident of their power to make the capture, Diana made manifest her control as she turned Actaeon into a stag to be eaten alive by his dogs as she metamorphosed back into human form. By “seducing the narrator,” Diana assumed control of the narrative.

These two possibilities for response to interpellation into dominant discourse describe the dynamics that Cliff creates for her characters and that Kincaid creates for hers. Clare’s re-visioned history is a reaction and leads her into the trap that history and ideology have set for her, having secured the power to enforce their viewpoint. In contrast, Kincaid’s heroines make what Lyotard calls a “reply.” Their response to interpellation shows that they refuse to be bound by the discourse that oppresses them, even if it may outwardly seem like they aren’t resisting. Whereas the agency found in Michelle Cliff’s writing can only be completed as she assumes the authorship of *the novel*, Kincaid’s Xuela and Annie are able to tell their own stories and maintain the position of the narrator. Although their resistance has been illegible to the community of critics because these women seem to ignore the precepts of community, nation, history and heritage that have characterized resistance literature in the past, it is not out of ignorance that they ignore this resistance discourse. Lyotard’s theory of narrative pragmatics suggests that their unwillingness to conform to resistance discourse can be interpreted as a refusal to be drawn into wasting energy on precepts inherited from

colonial discourse. Xuela's actions in *Autobiography of My Mother* work to question these precepts, while staunchly maintaining the primacy of the individual to determine the importance of them.

Though I have emphasized heretofore, the importance that individuals look critically at possible communities, I would like to explain now how these critical individuals will help to remake a more just society. Patricia Mann's important theorization of micropolitical action provides the concept of the engaged individual, and the benefits to communities made up of engaged individuals. Though some call Kincaid's heroines selfish, I will explicate how Annie's and Xuela's behavior might be understood as the basis for a more supportive community. Mann's book *Micro-politics* offers an insightful exploration of how a damaging ideology can lead to a perceived lack of agency. She argues that often circumstances change that can change the opportunities available to individuals, even though ideology lags behind not offering support to individuals who take advantage of those opportunities. She suggests that when individuals are confused about what to do in a particular situation, it is because ideology tells them they should not be in that situation. She gives reproductive technology as an example that has allowed women to separate two components of motherhood: child bearing and child rearing. Whereas women now have the opportunity to do either, both, or neither, ideology supports an understanding that women have a responsibility to both bear and rear children, rather than doing one or the other or neither. As a result, women may feel strange if they are not motivated (or do not have the desire) to have a child, and choose not to despite the responsibility that ideology places on them. And they may feel oppressed if they are not motivated to have a child but do out of a feeling of

responsibility. Mann argues that this feeling of oppression comes from acting out a false sense of responsibility, and that as more women choose according to their own motivations, ideology will slowly change to catch up with the subject-positions that women have acquired. Mann's thesis is that ideology will move to support women as they make choices about family structure based on their desires. This thesis has a parallel in Kincaid's project. Annie's and Xuela's actions are currently not supported by ideology of resistance, yet they provide, as Mann suggests, a model for individuals to follow in the future. They make a community that is closer to the type of community that will support them. Finally, the ideological objections will cease as engaged individualism is supported by Caribbean ideology.

The attitudes and actions of Kincaid's heroines, which she weaves into a model of individual resistance, agency, and subjectivity come across as strange to those looking for characters who see building community and nation as essential to constructing individual resistance to colonial hegemony. Kincaid's perceived disdain for community, her classically influenced writing style, her incisive focus on the domestic sphere (and therefore seemingly ahistorical focus and apolitical focus), and her affiliation with postmodernism have all been marshaled as evidence of her strangeness by critics hesitant to place her work alongside other politically-conscious Caribbean writers. These characteristics of Kincaid's writing do indeed seem diverse from the model of resistance characterized by Cliff, and they are. The next two chapters will outline Kincaid's model for resistance.

CHAPTER 2
SEDUCING THE NARRATOR: THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-DESIRE IN
KINCAID'S *AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MY MOTHER*

This chapter will discuss the ways that Jamaica Kincaid's *Autobiography of My Mother* makes explicit Kincaid's contestation of community, nation, history and heritage, and the responsibility of the individual to these concepts. Even as most critics of *Autobiography* recognize Kincaid's desire to resist colonial discourse, the resistance of her main character, Xuela, is not recognized as a viable strategy within the context of Caribbean resistance literature. After a brief introduction to the novel, I will introduce criticism of Kincaid's politics to suggest that critics dismiss her characters' behavior as a model of resistance because it lacks community spirit. I will then explain how Xuela establishes the problematic nature of her community in Antigua, showing the need to part from old models of individual and community. Finally, I will outline the narrative pragmatics which Xuela employs, and which allow her to solve the problem of subjectivity. Even though I will be arguing that in *Autobiography of My Mother*, Xuela represents an Annie from *Annie John* who has grown-up, and even though *Autobiography of My Mother* was published after *Annie John*, this paper will take up *Autobiography of My Mother* first. This will allow me to foreground Kincaid's more explicit resistance to modernist concepts that define subjectivity and resistance discourse in the Caribbean in *Autobiography of My Mother* before introducing the more subtle resistance of *Annie John* in Chapter 3 where I will discuss the narrative pragmatics that link the strategies of Xuela in *Autobiography of My Mother* and Annie in *Annie John* and then discuss more

specifically the requirement of self-love that is required for micro-political agency and that is hard-won in that novel.

Autobiography of My Mother has as its main character Xuela Claudette Richardson, the daughter of a Carib woman—who died giving birth to her—and a light skinned father of Scots and African descent. The story is written from Xuela’s point of view as a woman in her seventies looking back on her life. Because her mother died and her father was not willing to care for her, she spent the first few years of her life with a nanny whom she did not love and who did not love her. The narration that her mother is dead becomes a refrain in the novel, and this death gives her outsider status: it is introduced as the reason for her ability to resist being initiated into the cruelty of the community on the island. Xuela describes the pleasure that a mother must feel watching a child grow in a way that is reminiscent of the mirroring that Annie describes in *Annie John*.¹ Yet Xuela is denied this intimacy and can only imagine that the pleasure of watching someone grow

...is an invisible current between the two, observed and observer, beheld and beholder, and I believe that no life is complete, no life is really whole, without this invisible current which is in many ways a definition of love. No one observed and beheld me, I observed and beheld myself; the invisible current went out and it came back to me. I came to love myself in defiance, out of despair, because there was nothing else. Such a love will do, but it will only do...it is not to be recommended. (57)

Her self-love forms because of the absence of her mother. Although the oppressive nature of the modeling of colonially-bounded identity is downplayed, there is a hint of sadism in Kincaid’s description of watching an individual’s maturation measured by “the

¹ Chapter 2 will discuss mirror imagery in the mother-daughter relationship in *Annie John*. While Annie first finds her mother as a comfortable mirror for her own development, she eventually finds it oppressive and seeks to break the spell of her attachment to her mother.

weighing down of the brow, the heaviness of the heart and soul...the slowing down of footsteps not from old age but only with the caution of life” (57). Although she writes that this self-love is not recommended, there seems to be no equally liberating solution for Xuela or Annie represented within the writing of the Caribbean literary canon.

Eventually she moves in with her father and his new wife, who, Xuela writes, is threatened by her and tries to kill her. Xuela eventually moves into the home of a friend of her father, Jack LaBatte and his wife, Lise to be closer to school. Xuela is denied a caring relationship in this new place as well, as Lise wants Xuela to become pregnant with Jack’s child since she cannot have her own. Eventually, Xuela leaves and moves in with Philip, another friend of her father. She has a sexual relationship with this man as well and they eventually marry. Their relationship is not loving although they fulfill each others’ needs; these needs are not romantic however. Xuela fulfills Philip’s need to master—or pretends to—while Philip gives Xuela a chance to enact revenge on western colonial discourse through her mastery of him. Throughout the novel, Xuela refuses to have a child, using abortifacient herbs to rid herself of the children conceived from her sexual relations. The last section of the novel sees Xuela ruminating on her life: “I long to meet the thing to which I can submit. It is not in a book of history, it is not the work of anyone whose name can pass my own lips. Death is the only reality, for it is the only certainty, inevitable to all things” (*Autobiography* 228). Despite a lifetime of dealing with the people and society around her, Xuela has refused to find guidance in any certainty other than her own good and death.

Xuela’s unwillingness to make concessions to community or any other discourse unless it makes sense to her lies at the heart of Xuela’s resistance. This seeming self-

absorption also forms the basis of criticism about Kincaid, as she is often accused of rejecting Caribbean notions of community, nation, and history. Her writing style has been judged as having too much of a European influence, and both she and her characters have been called selfish and apolitical in their unwillingness to be pinned down to categories set by resistance discourse. Although criticism of the author is secondary to my argument about the narrative pragmatics that critics have ignored, it is important to note how these arguments against Kincaid all react to her investment in self-love in lieu of more accepted concepts of modernist thinking regarding community, nation, heritage and history. Jane King's vilification of Kincaid in her article "A Small Place Writes Back" seems to be the most acerbic of the group of critics who dispute Kincaid's resistance to communities, as she responds to Kincaid's *A Small Place*, and to a lesser extent, Kincaid's other writing. King writes that she comes from Antigua, as does Kincaid, but she takes exception to Kincaid's castigation of the island's government and frustration with the people of the island for their complicity with corrupt government in *A Small Place*. King argues that Kincaid's assessment of Antigua is not accurate. Although other Antiguanians have acknowledged its accuracy, many argue along with King that Kincaid should not have written badly about Antigua (Perry 499). Regardless, King suggests that Kincaid takes pleasure in the inability of the reader to pin her down, and she ends her essay with a codicil that alternates personal attacks on Kincaid with a larger critique of postmodernism's calling into question the individual's relationship with accepted categories and concepts:

Kincaid refuses to allow us to pin her down. She is an autobiographical writer who calls many of her books fiction...An Antiguan who lives in the US but claims to remain Antiguan while vilifying Antigua and sympathizing with the US's values. A person who reviles her mother in book after book but claims to think that her

mother is “a great person.” Whose emotions are all her own personal ones but finds that her descriptions of them happen to be useful to feminists, and to postcolonial theorists. And, above all, it is all postmodern. This shape-shifting, protean, slippery unwillingness to be pinned down—a consequence, I suggest of the very relaxed writing style of a very talented writer—is easily embraced by this recent tradition which enjoys refusing to search for definitions of such categories even as “woman.” (King 905)

King is frustrated that she is not able to pin Kincaid down with a definition, and that Kincaid’s freewriting manner does not require the author to exert ultimate control of ideas and events in the novel. Although King posits Kincaid’s outline of her writing style as evidence for her own allegation of lax writing, Kincaid’s style allows the writer to write a story without having to be concerned with directing the flow of ideas or images. In a discourse such as Caribbean writing that often laments its inability to think outside of an imposed language, with an imposed network of value that determines the individual’s relationship with the outside world, Kincaid suggests that the way she has found to write is to give her mind free range to assert the primacy of her self. This process allows the language and dominating structures to deconstruct themselves, and demonstrates Kincaid’s confidence that the sense of a narrative is held together only by its use to her.

Kincaid’s freewriting style is a way of “seducing” the normalizing language and structure as per Lyotard’s narrative pragmatics. Kincaid uses the colonizer’s tongue, English, without wasting energy to exert force to bend it into a form that may more approximate the expectations of the discourse but will still be an approximation. As she writes, inviting the colonizing language to flow through her, she shows in the protean shape of the text that comes out that there is room in the language to defeat it, but that defeating it requires that she refrain from guiding her thoughts too much and that she be unafraid of what will come out. Kincaid is writing, her style leaves room for her own

unconscious to make images, and it leaves room for the reader to make ideas from the words that Kincaid presents. Kincaid's style of not putting ideas together for the reader or herself suggests that she will need to be more open to what readers make of it. In light of Kincaid's confidence in the ability of her words to express the colonial experience, we should not be surprised that some critics call her a feminist writer while others call her postcolonial, or that King reads her as racist and self-indulgent, while Harold Bloom lauds her for her "literary qualities." All of these readings are left open by Kincaid's trust in her self and her own experiences to provide a framework for her writing. Since writing is understood to find its meaning in between the meaning that the writer creates and the meaning that the reader reads into it, a free writing style should not be understood by King to represent a sloppy writing style.

In her article "How Jamaica Kincaid writes the Autobiography of her Mother," Veronica Gregg goes a long way toward bringing critics to understand how Kincaid's *Autobiography of My Mother* and *A Small Place* participate in the tradition of Caribbean literature. Her explication of Kincaid hinges on addressing critics of Kincaid who object to Kincaid's resistance to acknowledge Afro-Caribbean cultural influence, the license she takes in writing badly about Antiguans in *A Small Place*, and the limited perception of her scope. Gregg makes three very important arguments that address these issues: first, she argues that Kincaid acknowledges cultural influence. Even though she rejects the idea that Afro-Caribbean tropes such as *obeah* influenced her writing she acknowledges that references to *obeah* are found throughout her writing. Gregg argues that since *obeah* is part of Kincaid's own heritage, the references seem natural to her, and their "influence" isn't felt. Second, Gregg argues that Kincaid's narrative voice in *A Small Place*

reinscribes the western gaze, but *Autobiography of My Mother* in which “the one who describes becomes the one who is described” suggests that Kincaid never forgets that her voice is not an objective one (Gregg 935). Third, Gregg argues that Kincaid is shifting away from the “apparently personal” aspects of the mother-daughter relationship to the more political aspect of writing the Native woman into the culture. She then points out that Kincaid herself has said that there are “wider implications than. . . the immediate mother and daughter [relationship]. . . . I'm really writing about mother country and subject daughter country. It certainly led me to see that I was obsessed with the powerful and powerless and the strong and the weak. . . . I've outgrown the domestic implications of the mother and the daughter, and it now has wider implications for me” (Kincaid qtd in Gregg 928). Although Gregg’s suggestion that writing about the mother-daughter relationship is more “apparently” personal, she does not define her position on whether the text is actually personal, or what constitutes personal writing. It seems that Kincaid herself has suggested that she has “outgrown” domestic implications and moved into viewing the “wider implications” of the mother-daughter relationship. So even as Gregg has explicated the overt political of implications of these two books, there is a need to explore the place of the mother-daughter relationship in Kincaid’s political writing. How is Kincaid’s polemical writing present in *Annie John*? Is it fair to suggest that the author has “outgrown” books like *Annie John* as her work turns more overtly political? I will now take up *Autobiography of My Mother* to explore Kincaid’s polemics against her community in detail.

In *Autobiography of My Mother*, Kincaid paints a picture of her mother’s homeland, Dominica. Kincaid asserts that society in Dominica is problematic, and the

corruption of society forms the basis for her need to resist community within the novel. Her main argument about the community is that history has taken its toll on individuals so that they are victors or victims, unable to assert their own will to gain pleasure from their lives. Kincaid places Xuela in a world in which all the other characters are acting out the effects of colonialism on each other. The narrator describes her father, Alfred, as a light skinned policeman of African and Scots descent, and of some power in the local community. He remarries to a darker woman and together they have two children, a boy and a girl. The family relationship is defined by their disregard for each other and the demands they put on each other. Alfred spends all his time working; Xuela rarely sees him out of his policeman uniform. He is conniving and heartless toward those in need and is sure to stay in the good graces of those with power in the society. The son, also named Alfred, dies before he reaches maturity, unwilling or unable to fulfill his father's desires for him to grow to be like him. Xuela's brother, Alfred, is not able to grow into the name of his father. He fails to thrive and eventually dies. This story of the stifling pressure on the child to grow into the parent is a subtle reminder of the importance of the death of Xuela's mother—whose name was also Xuela—in Xuela's own self-determination. Xuela's half-sister is a haunting reminder of what colonial womanhood would have in store for Xuela, had she had a mother and was inevitably ignored by her because of the lack of love between mothers and daughters in the Caribbean that Xuela outlines. None of the family members—other than Xuela—are able to take pleasure in themselves or each other, even though they are relatively well off and powerful.

The Scots heritage and relative power of the father also allows Kincaid to explore the effects of colonialism within the scope of the community. His power in the

community is signified by his role as policeman, and Xuela remarks that his police uniform grew into his body and became his real skin (Kincaid 90). That he wears his uniform at home suggests that the power of colonial law infringes on the family. But rather than the concept of family as allegory for the nation or community, Kincaid argues that the family politics and community politics are inseparable; the mechanics of that infringement depend on the inability of the individual to separate communal subject formation from personal subject formation. The communal power of the man can only be maintained by his refusal to shed his authority, even in more intimate family settings: Alfred would never allow anyone to see him eat or do anything that would remind people of his humanness because it would demystify his position of power over them. His mastery of creating an image, or narrative, of himself that is inseparable from the power given to him by his police uniform makes him a god among men in the community. Xuela explains the connection between his role and the community and colonialism: “inside my father (and also inside the island on which he was born, inside the island on which he now lived), an event that occurred hundreds of years before, the meeting of man and people, continued on a course so subtle that it became a true expression of his personality, it became who he really was” (*Autobiography* 187). With this statement, Kincaid sets up her model of the individual as microcosm of colonialism. The passage suggests that no re-visioning of the individual that happens outside of the novel—such as Cliff’s ability to depict her fragmented self—is going to save the Caribbean from men like Alfred who naturalize and enact colonial discourse so that it becomes their very core.

Xuela writes about her father’s difference from those on the island who identify themselves as the “native” population: his victory and their defeat:

These other people, the natives, had become bogged down in issues of justice and injustice, and they had become attached to claims of ancestral heritage, and the indignities by which they had come to these islands, as if they mattered, really mattered. Not so my father. He had a view of things, of history, of time, as if he had lived through many ages, and what he might have seen was that in the short run everything mattered and in the long run nothing mattered. It would all end in nothing, death. (117)

This statement suggests that those who put their faith in abstractions such as history and heritage will always lose to those exert their will in the moment.

Xuela illustrates the yielding of power from the individual to Alfred, and Alfred's blindness to any other ideologies [narratives]—besides his own ends—as she narrates a scene in which a man named Lazarus comes to ask Alfred for hurricane supplies that the government has entrusted Alfred to distribute. Although Alfred is supposed to dispense the free supplies to those who need them, he only gives them for free to those who have power and can afford them and to just enough of the poor people to avoid getting in trouble with the government. Usually when he offers them to the poor, he charges amounts that are exorbitant or prohibitive. Lazarus comes to Alfred for nails and goes away empty handed because Alfred lies that he does not have any. Xuela writes that in Lazarus, whose red hair suggests that he also is a result of African and Scots intermixing, “too the event of the African people meeting the hyphenated man had taken on such subtlety that any way he chose to express himself was only a reminder of this: a happy song for him would be all about the idea of freedom, not a day spent lying on the sand near the sea in aimless pleasure” (188). The difference between Alfred and Lazarus is that whereas Alfred does what he needs to in order to get ahead, and thinks of freedom as his ability to exert power in his community, Lazarus has no power in the community. That Lazarus would feel happy thinking about “the idea of freedom” rather than a “day

spent...in aimless pleasure" suggests that he will never achieve freedom, since what he thinks of as freedom does not require his own physical satisfaction. Alfred's freedom relies on his ability to maintain power and work toward his own ends.

In this scene, Kincaid shows that Lazarus was defeated indirectly by history, but the direct and immediate cause of his defeat was his unwillingness to assert himself, in the face of Alfred's primacy of self. Xuela makes the argument that her father will always be the victor because he lives for the short term: he makes decisions that allow him satisfy his desires to the fullest extent before he dies, while he creates a mystique around himself that compels others to never interfere with his desired end. The microcosm of the Caribbean community that this interaction between Lazarus and Alfred represents suggests that because colonial values and ideologies are internalized, no Caribbean community can be assumed to be safe or valuable for Caribbean individuals until some method is found to exorcize internalized self-denial. In this event, Xuela argues that re-visioning history will only distract individuals from the need to fix effects of that history of uneven mixing unless it also presents a model for individuals to recognize the importance of their own selves and desires. The model of Alfred is not a model for agency that will heal the Caribbean community, since it is, in fact only a reaction to the injustice in the community. His will leaves no room for the desire of others, and he refuses to cede any power to anyone, even those such as Lazarus who are clearly powerless. Alfred does inspire in Xuela an understanding of the ability of desire to win power, but Xuela tempers this desire with a desire for justice. Both desires are executed in way that creates an effective but *subtle* resistance, to match the "subtlety" of the result of the meeting between Africa and Europe in the Caribbean.

As they focus more on the political possibilities of Kincaid's writing, critics such as Veronica Gregg and Diane Simmons are beginning to acknowledge Kincaid's critique against colonial discourse and even the Caribbean community in *Autobiography of My Mother*. Still too often, their writing points to a totalizing emptiness of Xuela's life that obscures the value in Kincaid's intervention, and the justice she works for even as she works for self-preservation. Diane Simmons writes in her article "Coming-of-Age in the Snare of History" of this emptiness:

In Kincaid's earlier work, her girls Annie and Lucy still believe they can free themselves from the power relationships into which they were born. They still seek a form of love and nurture—even if it is only self-love and self-nurture—that does not, finally, erase them, replacing the self with a set of characteristics that define the deepest levels of subjugation. But with Kincaid's novel, *The Autobiography of My Mother*, Kincaid's girl no longer hopes for the freedom to build an authentic self. In a work that reviewers have called "inhuman" and "almost unbearable" (Schine), "bitter" and "repell[ant]" (Kakutani), Kincaid portrays a world in which the coming-of-age girl is hopelessly trapped in history. There is nowhere to turn but to revenge, nothing to nurture but a heart that is cold and closed. (Simmons 107)

Simmons' assertion that Xuela will be unable to build an "authentic self" is predicated on her assumption that Xuela does not nurture or love herself and that she is motivated only by revenge. Similarly, Gregg, one of Kincaid's most sympathetic readers writes, "The protagonist articulates, even as she embodies, the workings of a powerful but empty system through which the dominant history, language, and knowledge of the West Indies have been construed" (Gregg 935). These arguments suggest that Kincaid is a product of this system of dominant discourse, which is true, but it would be wrong to conclude that her embodiment of this system leaves Xuela herself empty; on the contrary, she never loses sight of herself.

Early on, Xuela stumbles on her ability to use to her advantage her lack of attachment to make things happen in the way that she wants them to, and because of this

experience, she learns the importance of recognizing and asserting her own desires. Her colonial school teaches her to write letters by copying model letters “of someone whose complaints or perceptions of joys were of no interest to [her]” (*Autobiography* 19). This enforced modeling of the individual’s narrative position as writer of an approved narrative is another example of colonial narrative pragmatics, working to create colonial subjects. But Xuela takes the knowledge that she learns about letters and writes letters to her father about how miserable she is. Her father is given the letters by the teacher, is moved by them and brings Xuela to live with him. Of this experience she writes,

I did not immediately recognize what had happened, what I had done: however unconsciously, however without direction, I had, through the use of some words, changed my situation; I had perhaps even saved my life. To speak of my own situation, to myself or to others, is something I would always do thereafter. It is in this way that I came to be so extremely conscious of myself, so interested in my own needs, so interested in fulfilling them, aware of my grievances, aware of my pleasures. (22)

Xuela learns that she needs to examine her own will and express it to make things happen and that her expressions do not always need to truthfully represent her feelings, but that they can be used as a tool. The letters that spurred the changes that brought about her new life were not sincere, since she had been actually writing them for her mother, but addressed them to her father not intending that he would see them. From then on, she learns that it is to her benefit to seduce her narrators by talking to effect action or guarantee her safety rather than speak truth. And she continues to navigate her new life using this principle, getting much practice from her family situation. Xuela writes that her stepmother tried to kill her with obeah because she was envious. Xuela outlines her calculations about how she can appear pious so that her stepmother would not become more jealous, and her description of the amount of calculation in this endeavor fills an

entire page which ends with “I negotiated many treacherous acts of deception, but it was clear to me who I really was” (42).

Despite the misery and ineffable cruelty in the community, it would be to ignore the message of Kincaid’s writing to think of Xuela as a helpless and miserable victim. Xuela writes, “the impulse to possess is alive in every heart...I chose to possess myself” (*Autobiography* 174). Although she suggests that the need to possess is unavoidable, her decision to possess herself resists victimization by her society, as it she resists victimizing other colonial subjects. The misery that critics often emphasize leaves a reader wondering why Xuela would be so adamant about ending her family line, yet would resist oppression so tirelessly, living until her seventies. Her principle of self-possession suggests that Xuela does feel that her own life is important. She does not want to end her life, and more importantly, she experiences pleasure, and experiences pleasure in possessing herself:

I came to know myself, and this frightened me. To rid myself of this fear I began to look at a reflection of my face in any surface I could find: a still pool on the shallow banks of the river became my most common mirror. When I could not see my face, I could feel that I had become hard; I could feel that to love was beyond me, that I had gained such authority over my own ability to be that I could cause my own demise with complete calm. I knew, too, that I could cause the demise of others with the same complete calm. It was seeing my own face that comforted me...I loved my mouth; my lips were thick and wide, and when I opened my mouth I could take in volumes, pleasure and pain,...no matter how swept away I would become by anyone or anything, in the end I allowed nothing to replace my own being in my own mind. (100)

Her profession shows the extent to which Xuela values her self and is able to take pleasure in herself and the world, although at first, this knowledge of herself frightened her because of the power that mastery requires. Above all, Xuela watches out for her own good. When she finds out that she is pregnant, she feels stifled, and chooses to abort the

child because she does not want it and could not love it. The self-assuredness, stoicism and precision with which Xuela controls her fertility is startling, and could be confusing to critics who adhere to the primacy of motherhood and the community as healing factors in the community.² Indeed the unwillingness of Xuela to have children stands in stark contrast to Clare in *No Telephone to Heaven* who is infertile and is refused at an adoption agency. Despite society denial of granting Clare a “legitimate” parenthood through allowing adoption, Clare suggests that her actions with the group of guerilla soldiers are on behalf of the children of Jamaica, who are her figurative children that she loves (Cliff 195). It is interesting that even though critics seem to be veering from standard assumptions about the importance of motherhood, community and nation in the Caribbean as they recognize Kincaid’s resistance in *Autobiography of My Mother*, they are only able to imagine this rejection alongside a complete surrender to misery and emptiness.

Regardless of the corruption of society, Xuela is able to protect herself and maintain control in situations that seem like hopeless consequences of an unfair history. When critics ignore the pragmatics of these situations, Xuela’s success within the plane of events of the novel is lost and *Autobiography of My Mother* is written off as a “sad book” (Simmons). Xuela alludes to the possible readings of her marriage to Philip when she writes that her half-sister is awed at Xuela’s ability to marry a white man, but Xuela writes “that Philip was empty of real life and energy, used up, too tired even to give himself pleasure, that I did not love him, never occurred to her; it never occurred to her

² Donna Perry emphasizes community in the relationships of women in the Caribbean: “for the woman of color, her mother and the women in her family and/or community provide strength, self-confidence, an individual and communal history, and heavy dose of reality. For whatever the tensions these characters encounter at home are minor annoyances compared to their oppression in a racist culture” (Perry 138).

that my marriage represented a kind of tragedy, a kind of defeat” (*Autobiography* 212). Because of the history of domination suffered by indigenous women in the Caribbean inflicted by desires of colonizing men, one might argue that the marriage between a Carib woman and a white man is a tragedy as it reinscribes the colonial domination of the Carib woman.³ Here, Xuela claims the opposite—her marriage represents tragedy because she masters Philip, where colonial discourse would seek to uphold the illusion of mastery that white people have over those of Carib and African heritage. The difference between the historical situation of the victimized indigenous woman and Xuela’s victimized husband is Xuela’s ability to enact desire—Philip is too old to take any pleasure in himself or in Xuela and so it is her desire and not his that is the controlling factor of their relationship. In fact, they move to the mountains to live among the aging community of Caribs where Xuela gains complete control of his relations with the outside world. Xuela writes of his inability to live without her: “He now lived in a world in which he could not speak the language. I mediated for him, I translated for him. I did not always tell him the truth...I blocked his entrance to the world in which he lived; eventually I blocked his entrance into all the worlds he had come to know” (*Autobiography* 224). Her choice to control Philip’s life makes Xuela seem vengeful and controlling.

Simmons connects Xuela’s relationship with Philip to all the children that she aborts in the years that have passed and sums up the revenge Xuela takes on Philip: “Thus stolen from himself, he becomes ‘all the children’ Xuela ‘did not allow to be born’ [224]. For she is sterile, too; her revenge upon him, her destruction of his world, is her

³ Kathryn Elizabeth Morris writes in *Skirting History: Decolonizing Strategies in Caribbean Women’s Literature* that the “indigenous woman is seen as the paradigm and symbol of a conquered people, one that has been opened and penetrated (53).

only offspring” (“Snare” 116). She and other critics are repelled by what they construe as Xuela’s desire for revenge. But examining the narrative pragmatics that surround the situation that connects Xuela, her aborted children and her relationship with Philip elucidate the way that this revenge is *not* the inevitable result of a woman “trapped in history” as Simmons suggests. Rather than simple revenge, her actions are founded on the importance of putting herself first (a principle which she holds to *despite* the surrounding emptiness) as well as her desire to shield children from the colonial oppression that leads her to choose to divert violence from these children to Philip. It is not that vengeance is her offspring; rather, the colonial system taught mastery where it should have taught nurture. She has learned well that mastery and self-desire above all are the tools she needs to survive, and that only through these tools can she work to control who the victim of her mastery is. She can only identify and perform her conception of justice, protecting her children through aborting them, through self-mastery: the relentless execution of her own desires.

Xuela says of her aborted children that it is not that they were dead, they just were “not to be at all,” establishing first the three eventualities of the moral decision she is faced with on finding that she is pregnant with a “child [she] could not love and so did not want” (89): giving the child life, giving the child death, or acting so that the child would just not be. But she fantasizes about what would happen if she allowed her possible children to live in the following extended quotation:

I would never become a mother, but that would not be the same as never bearing children. I would bear children, but I would never be a mother to them. I would bear them in abundance...I would bear children, they would hang from me like fruit from a vine, but I would destroy them with the carelessness of a god. I would bear children in the morning, I would bathe them at noon in a water that came from myself, and I would eat them a night, swallowing them whole, all at once. They

would live and then they would not live. In their day of life, I would walk them to the edge of a precipice. I would not push them over; I would not have to; the sweet voices of unusual pleasures would call to them from its bottom; they would not rest until they became one with these sounds. I would cover their bodies with diseases, embellish skins with thinly crusted sores, the sores sometimes oozing a thick pus for which they would thirst, a thirst that could never be quenched. I would condemn them to live in an empty space frozen in the same posture in which they had been born. I would throw them from a great height; every bone in their body would be broken and the bones would never be properly set, healing in the way they were broken, healing never at all. I would decorate them when they were only corpses and set each corpse in a polished wooden box, and place the polished wooden box in the earth and forget the part of the earth where I had buried the box. It is in this way that I did not become a mother; it is in this way that I bore my children. (97)

I quote this section at length to suggest the gruesome possibility of Xuela's motherhood—the words in this section flow with such fervor that it seems inevitable that this type of monstrous motherhood would result if Xuela allowed a child to be born. Her fertility, indicated by children hanging off her like fruit, is poisoned by her inability to love. This living death that she envisions for her children is reminiscent of her own life, and possibly worse because it describes a mother actively enforcing the pain where Xuela was abandoned to feel the pain of being “frozen in the same posture” she had been born in, looking toward the loss of her mother, a wound which would never properly heal. Xuela's children would feel all the pain of a distant mother, except Xuela would be alive to actively create the distance and betray her children to a world determined by the cycle of colonial violence. In light of the possibility of bearing a life that would be more like a death, she decides that her children are simply not to be. She refuses to “mother” her children, even though she would herself bear the violence and knowledge of the pain of this refusal of motherhood.

It is my argument that it is Xuela's choice to take responsibility to refuse to enact violence on her children that makes her more a mother than her step-mother is to her

step-sister, or more a parent than her father is to her. Her self-mastery and self-possession do not lead her to disregard those in her community who mean her no harm. In fact, when it does not interfere with her self-possession, Xuela, actively helps those in her community. Xuela cares for her step-sister's child until it dies for lack of love, since her step-sister could not love it. Because she actively seeks to reduce the violence induced by colonialism, she wills her children not to live, while bearing the weight of the violence within her that threatens to turn monstrous by devouring those who depend on her.

Because Alfred was Xuela's model for self-desire and talking for effect, it is important to point out as well another difference in the motives of the two. Xuela seems at all times self-aware of the outcome that she desires as well as the effect on those around her, she is forever aware that her convictions, emotions and desires should be the master of her expressions. Whatever actions she must take to effect her desire in the world cannot touch her inner desire and personhood. On the other hand, the desires of her father create a mask:

The man...existed... but the person they saw was an expression of my father's desires, an expression of his needs; the personality they were observing was like a suit of clothes my father had made for himself, and eventually he wore it so long that it became impossible to remove, it covered completely who he really was; who he really might have been became unknown, even to himself." (*Autobiography* 54)

Where Xuela maintains control over her desire, Alfred is bound by a mask that encapsulates the original desire for power and ends up controlling him. No longer is a person, able to feel, at the root of the action. The colonial violence has taken over and despite Alfred's status as a policeman, he can admit no justice outside of the self-legitimizing power of the colonial mask.

The mask began as a matter of convenience: “My father had invented himself, had made himself up as he went along; when he wanted something, he made himself meet the situation, he made his cut fit the jib” (53). Because he uncompromisingly sought power through the channels of the colonial system, that system formed him and his desires. This self-love is different from Xuela’s, since Xuela’s has a self where Alfred no longer does. Xuela’s self-love is not easy; she suggests that it is not recommended, as it isolates the self from the expression, making any work against outward power an uphill battle. But as her self-love is the one thing that has kept her safe, her behavior does represent a possibility. To outline the mechanics that underpin her behavior, I would like to examine the narrative pragmatics of her actions.

Xuela has attested to the inability of women in the Caribbean to love and nurture their children, and even though she is able to survive by keeping her desires at the heart of her existence, she knows that she will be unable to avoid inflicting the colonial inheritance of violence and destruction on relationships. Yet, she still desires to be cared for. Of her marriage to Philip, she writes that it allows her to think of her life with romance and to think well of herself at night. Revenge—a situation of retaliating violence for violence—is certainly a response that Lyotard would consider a reaction: a doomed action that acknowledges the power of an enemy by acknowledging the rules of the “game” he suggests. It seems that Xuela’s relationship with Philip, though violent and destructive, is not exactly vengeful. If the reader thinks of colonial discourse as a narrator, the violence and destruction that the subjects learn from it is the narrative. This narrative of interpersonal violence has been set in motion, to be repeated in endless chains of narrators and narratees, receiving and in turn inflicting violence. Kincaid writes

“In a place like this, brutality is the only real inheritance and cruelty is sometimes the only thing freely given”: the narrative of violence is too hard to stop and will be absorbed by all subjects involved (5). As a point of comparison with *No Telephone to Heaven*, the inability to purge violence from the community in Cliff’s narrative resulted in the betrayal of Clare’s guerilla group, and in the guerilla group’s violence toward the Hollywood narrative.

It is unfair to judge Kincaid as selfish based on her re-enactment of this violence. More importantly, it is shortsighted to ignore the way that *despite* the intractable cruelty and misery, Xuela is able to take stock of the situation, calculate the way in which her needs can be fulfilled, and redefine motherhood by refusing to become prey to the colonial narrative of violence in order to prevent innocents from encountering the violence of the community. One might argue that whereas the narrator in this situation is colonial discourse, Philip is the one who is punished. But Xuela does assert that everyone in the society is guilty of giving violence or is a victim to it. Philip has assumed the role of the narrator, parroting the narrative of colonial discourse. Xuela reminds us as well that he was “of the victors, and so much a part of him was this situation” (*Autobiography* 217). Although it would be better to break the cycle of violence—that which Xuela writes is impossible—Xuela is able to switch the narratees of the violence that she must necessarily enact, and protect her unborn children. Because Kincaid creates a character that is so willing to take responsibility for her self and her life, she is able to create the character and solution on the same plane. Xuela becomes the narrator of her own narrative and the plane of discourse coincides with the plane of events. Whereas Clare must be mediated in *No Telephone to Heaven* by the narrator’s voice, because she does

not survive to tell her own story, Xuela's conversational tone and the frequent meta-textual interruptions remind the reader constantly of her narrative control over the whole text. *Autobiography of My Mother* is written from Xuela's point of view, with her limited but precocious knowledge, and Xuela's responsibility for her own story comes only with her own mastery of the art of speaking to effect her own safety and desires.

Autobiography of My Mother shows how Kincaid orders the effects of history on the individual situation on a utilitarian basis of self recognition of need that reflects Lyotard's concept of pagan narrative pragmatics; she asserts the responsibility of the individual in making the decision to validate history and its discourses, or to refuse to do so in order to become the narrator of one's own life. Whereas the importance of history to the present has been one of the main themes of Caribbean literature, the pragmatic method of speaking for effect is useful as well in determining how to represent history. *Autobiography of My Mother* suggests that the individual must make history relevant by acting as the victim who does not assert himself or as the victor who asserts his own will and desire at every opportunity. And Kincaid's recognition of "history" follows the same utilitarian rule of relevance. Xuela writes, "The past is a room full of baggage and rubbish and sometimes things that are of use, but if they are of real use, I have kept them" (205), highlighting Kincaid's underlying assumption about the relevance of history to the present: she rejects the idea that an individual must dig up and re-vision history to gain agency. Rather, she argues that those things that are of value to her are generally the ones that she has kept.

When history, or the past, has been useful to Kincaid, she acknowledged it. Kathryn Morris' *Skirting History* has done impressive research documenting the Carib

Leap. She writes that in Grenada in 1650 or 1652 according to different accounts, a group of Caribs leapt off of what became known as *Morne Sauteurs* to resist being taken by French soldiers. She suggests that this was known as the Carib leap in folktales and that it was understood as a refusal to be dominated by western society (Morris 49). It does seem that Kincaid draws upon this “historical” event as an analogy for the resistance of the Carib society to assimilation in this novel. More tellingly about Kincaid’s “use” of history, the reader hears an echo of history in the way that Xuela’s refusal to mother children into oppression suggests the abortions reported in slave societies. But these analogies evolve naturally out of Xuela’s situation—Xuela’s formulation of her experience and the integration of history into her life seem so natural because she is not integrating history into her life. Rather, history is all around as the collection of ideas and behaviors that are passed on to her, but most of what the readers sees is Xuela’s self. Morris writes that Kincaid’s use of the Carib Leap “represents an emerging national and historical consciousness” (Morris 59). However, Kincaid’s positioning herself on the brink of oblivion, then *not* jumping off actually contests the willed death of the Carib Leap, and emphasizes her refusal to be part of a race or nation. Xuela writes the indigenous woman into existence because it is her *mother* rather than out of responsibility to examine the deepest layers of her history. Any feelings that Xuela has or action that she makes comes out of her experience. Imposing Kincaid’s ordering history or intertextual relationships to other authors who are writing resistance literature would not make sense within the plane of action of the novel.

As becomes clear from this section, a practice of narrative pragmatics through which individuals can negotiate categories of nation and community, heritage and history

needs first a theory of will or desire. If individuals are to act and speak with the desired effect in mind, they must first know how to acknowledge and trust their desire and themselves. Lazarus, the gravedigger who asks Xuela's father for nails but cannot imagine a day spent in aimless pleasure, stands in stark contrast with Xuela who writes, "My impulse is to the good, my good is to serve myself. I am not a people, I am not a nation" (216). In *Autobiography of My Mother*, Xuela happens upon this will to bring about her interests because she does not have a mother, and so is not driven to gain the love that is not love among people who are taught to mistrust each other. The next section will take up *Annie John* in which Annie John, the main character *does* have a mother and fights a hard-won battle to gain the agency that allows her to trust in herself so that she can make decisions that resist her mother and colonial discourse's intrusion into her family.

Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* also negotiates community, nation, history and heritage. This chapter introduced the value of analyzing the narrative pragmatics in Kincaid's work and explained that *Autobiography of My Mother* has been read as a book without hope, but might instead be understood as a pragmatic model for action. The next chapter will take up Kincaid's earlier book, *Annie John*, in which Kincaid's critique of colonialism is more subtle and often understated in criticism. The difference in reception between *Annie John* and her later books *A Small Place*, *Autobiography of My Mother*, and *My Brother* suggests that there is a need to re-examine *Annie John* to discover the subtlety of Kincaid's resistance and see how her methods can be understood

CHAPTER 3
“AND I HAVE MADE A VOW NEVER TO BE FOOLED AGAIN:” NARRATIVE
PRAGMATICS AND THE FORMATION OF SELF AND DESIRE IN JAMAICA
KINCAID’S *ANNIE JOHN*

Although the resistance that Jamaica Kincaid’s main character Annie offers in *Annie John* is more subtle than Xuela’s resistance in *Autobiography of My Mother*, these two heroines both resist colonial discourse, and use similar strategies to do so. The most noticeable connection between *Annie John* and *Autobiography of My Mother* is the similarity of the main characters. Kincaid has suggested that all of the main characters in her novels represent herself, so they are linked through her. In addition, Xuela and Annie have the same name as their mothers. More importantly, we see at the end of *Annie John* a younger Xuela: their personalities seem similar in their confidence in themselves and their detachment from their communities. Although Xuela describes herself as emotionally detached from her community from the moment she was born, Annie grows into her detachment. This detachment seems to coincide with the loss of the mother from the daughter’s life, through death in *Autobiography* and a more figurative but self-mandated distancing in *Annie John*. Whereas the early death of Xuela’s mother frees her from maternal domination to act in her own best interests, Annie must first overcome her mother’s domination.

This chapter will explain Annie’s initial contestations of colonial discourse and her attempts at resistance to colonial domination in terms of Lyotard’s pagan narrative pragmatic technique of speaking to create the desired effect. This method is particularly

appropriate to *Annie John* because it puts in context the use of language to manipulate what Annie learns from her mother and experiments with herself at the beginning of the novel. It also explains the necessity and permanence of the detachment of her feelings from her expression of those feelings in the end of the novel. From this learned detachment, Annie gains the confidence to become her own narrator, as *Annie John* develops into an autobiography as if written by a self-assured young woman who has taken responsibility for her narrative, similar to *Autobiography of My Mother*. Yet, critics have been less sure about the relevance of Kincaid's methods in *Annie John* for Caribbean individuals.

Donna Perry has suggested that Annie and her mother's relationship are representative of the tension in all mother daughter relationships, and so characterize Kincaid's writing as more relevant to a general feminist critique than postcolonial one. Jane King, stressing the importance of community and nation to the Caribbean individual, has argued Annie cannot be a suitable model for resistance since she wants to escape from Antigua. Neither of these readings has been able to explain the crisis of identity that Annie experiences near the end of the novel or the strange occurrence of her grandmother's arrival to help her through the illness from Dominica on a day that no steamer was scheduled to come.

I will present a reading of Patricia Mann, whose theory of micropolitics introduces a theory of agency that discusses the importance of desire in action as well as how acting without desire can create feelings of meaninglessness. I will argue that the debilitating depression that entombs Annie can be explained in terms the misalignment of desire and action that Annie is taught by her mother and that her mother in turn has

learned from colonial discourse. During Annie's hallucinatory illness, she is able to conjure a proxy for the lack of female guidance in her surroundings. Finally, I will discuss the criticism of *Annie John* to show that despite Kincaid's negotiation of the effects of colonialism on the family and individual agency in *Annie John*, this resistance is invisible to critics who expect resistant texts to parrot modernist concepts of the nation. Because Kincaid does not seem to engage western modernism, she is able to slip under the radar of colonial discourse and resistance discourse alike and create an effective model of individual action featuring narrators who are able to desire and act with intention.

Jamaica Kincaid places the main character and namesake of the novel *Annie John* on the island of Antigua. Her life with her mother and father become a type of primal scene for the Caribbean female who is assimilated to colonial discourse through family relationships. Kincaid testifies to the problem of familial relations in the Caribbean when she says in an interview: "the relationship between the mother and daughter mirrors the relationship between 'Europe' and the place that [Annie is] from" (Kincaid qtd. in Alexander 45). Even though mothers throughout the world are expected to have power over their daughters, motherhood in Antigua and other British colonies is haunted by the more abstract power of the Queen Mother, the Queen of England. This queen mother dominates the colonies politically, economically, and culturally, while claiming to be *the* model for both identity and motherhood—in effect stifling the emergence of a Caribbean identity. Alexander writes that mothers in Caribbean literature tend to either re-enact this domination on their daughters, stifling their daughters' identities, or if the daughters resist their domination, respond by distancing themselves from their daughters, leaving the

daughters to find other models of womanhood. Because of the alternate distance and suffocation, those daughters who resist assimilating to their mothers' identities find it hard to be confident of their own identities.

It is important to track Annie's resistance to her mother's demands for her to assimilate to her values, since Annie's resistance to her mother provides an analogue for other Caribbean resistance literature with concerns about assimilation to the European worldview, or creolization. In Chapter 1, I mentioned Veronica Gregg's exploration of the importance of figures such as *obeah* to critics of Kincaid's writing, and I also mentioned Simon Gikandi's suggestion that the desire to fertilize Caribbean writing with figures of the repressed Afro-Caribbean 'other' is one of the bases for Caribbean writing. *Autobiography of My Mother* shares with these writers resistance to assimilation in her refusal to be drawn into a European value system. The foregrounding of the Carib woman who is written into history makes *Autobiography* seem more polemical, but Annie John must also resist assimilation. The difference between Annie's and Xuela's childhood is dependent on difference in their familial relationships; and this itself suggests that the mother-daughter relationship is a political issue. But the politics involved need to be viewed through the identity formation that Annie learns through her mother.

Identity formation and the role of the mother in it might be explicated in terms of Jacques Lacan's "Mirror Stage." I will introduce this concept and show how we might adapt it using Lyotard's concept of narrative pragmatics to describe Mrs. John's use of narrative to model Annie's colonial identity to her and Annie's use of narrative to resist and misrepresent herself through lying. According to Lacan's model, infants learn to structure their identities through a series of misrecognitions. An infant sees her image

in a mirror and must recognize that it is herself but that she is more than the image—that although she can see the image as a replica that *looks* complete and solid, as it does to other people, her “true” identity lies within and cannot be represented in such a solidified form. This primal recognition and misrecognition sets the precedent for the ability of all of us to see images and people, such as parents, as models for our own identities.

Because Annie is unable to be the mirror image of her mother because her mother is light-skinned with European features and Annie has darker skin with more Afro-Caribbean features that become more pronounced as she reaches puberty, Mrs. John creates models of an acceptable identity in language and narrative for Annie. The first indication of the ways in which Annie is expected to model herself on her mother is their shared name. Annie John is named after her mother, Annie John but takes on the nickname Little Miss, a name indicative of her parents’ expectation that Annie will grow up to become just like her mother. But more telling than this “mirror image” of a name for Annie to grow into, Mrs. John tells Annie stories about when Annie was growing up. Annie writes that her favorite childhood activity was to examine, together with her mother, the memorabilia that defined her history. Annie writes of her mother, “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” (21). Even when she was old enough to remember a certain story, it is gratifying for her to hear it told back to her by her mother.

The manipulation that is at the heart of this language modeling comes to light when the reader juxtaposes on one hand the idea of Jamaica Kincaid as Annie, constituted by

this semi-autobiographical novel, *Annie John*, and on the other, the idea of Annie preferring her mother to tell her history. I suggested in Chapter 1 that Caribbean writers such as Michelle Cliff have taken on the project of renegotiating their relationship with writing about the Caribbean, taking back the position of the narrator from colonial texts. In *Annie John*, Annie is confronted very early with her mother telling her about her life, and the problematic of the novel becomes whether Annie John will grow up into *Annie John*, the self who writes the novel, or Mrs. Annie John, her mother who tells her history. This problematic becomes clear only once the reader learns to see the struggle as the struggle for narrative and meaning, where meaning becomes the self that Annie is trying to become. The dynamics in this struggle can be recognized as well in Lyotard's pagan narrative pragmatics.

Lyotard argues that the struggle for power is always one that requires a narrator to assert a narrative and that requires the narratee to believe it. So, Mrs. John presents Annie a story of Annie's life, and Annie's decision to believe it or not will lead Annie to either accept that her self is the self described to her by Mrs. John's stories, or to deny the self that Mrs. John describes, instead telling her own story about herself. At the beginning of the novel, Annie feels comforted by her mother's telling of her history. She loves the attention that her mother gives her and the implication that they are mirror images. That she does not believe her mother's stories about her becomes clear by the end of the novel, eponymously named *Annie John*, and narrated by Annie John. But *how* Annie John takes the narrator's responsibility for the narrative is more complicated than in *Autobiography of My Mother* because Annie's self is not as clear to her. That she is attached to her mother and motivated by her attachment to her—first in the form of love, then as

hatred—rather than her own desires becomes an obstacle in applying the theory of narrative pragmatics to colonial societies. Lyotard asserts that it is wise to speak in order to achieve the desired effect. But in order to hypothesize that effect, an individual must be clear about interpreting her own desire and translating that desire into action. Annie begins as Lazarus in *Autobiography of My Mother*, unable to align motivation and action, except in her motivation to be loved by her mother.

As Annie reaches adolescence, Mrs. John distances herself. Mrs. John's performance of their connection used to allow Annie to say, "As we sat in this bath, my mother would bathe different parts of my body; then she would do the same to herself" (*AJ* 14). However, when Annie reaches adolescence, her mother insists that Annie is too old to depend on her identity being modeled to her through a bodily analogy with her mother. Annie looks into a mirror to notice that puberty has widened her nose and darkened her skin. The colonial system in the Caribbean over-determines women's bodies: Mrs. John's European features are privileged because they indicate properness, and Annie's darker features are not privileged because they suggest African and inferior traits (Alexander 52). She is haunted by her inability to become the mirror image of her mother. She begins to make up stories that deny the growing gap between her mother and herself and that attempt to stave off her increasing feeling of the fissure between her self and her mother, whom she used to depend on as her self.

At school, she is pleased with the schoolteacher's assignment to spend the morning in "reflection" and write an autobiography. According to the teacher's description of her assignment, examining oneself naturally leads to autobiography, the writing of oneself into a unified whole. Annie says, "I got up and started to read, my voice shaky at first, but

since the sound of my own voice had always been a calming potion to me, it wasn't long before I was reading in such a way that...the only sound to be heard was my voice as it rose and fell in sentence after sentence." Her initial anxiety is evidenced by her shaky or fragmented voice, but she regains composure as she speaks herself into wholeness.

Annie's "autobiographical" story is one that expresses fear at losing her mother. The event in the story is only a part of the larger story of a recurring dream that Annie has, in which her mother is sitting on a rock in the ocean but does not come when she calls. She rewrites the story so that her mother reassures her and, "the memory of the dark time when I felt I would never see her again did not come back to haunt me" (44). This is contrary to the separation that happens in her nightmare, and that is happening in her waking life. Her fabricated narrative is another coping mechanism that allows Annie to ignore her lack of a structuring identity. The uncertainty in her story and the gaps in her speech are smoothed over as the sound of her autobiographical voice in its integrity reassures her that she is whole. Although this is certainly an example of speaking for the effect, Annie is just barely keeping afloat, and is not yet strong enough to resist outside pressure. The purpose or effect of the stories she is telling is to make herself feel whole and keep functioning as an individual, although her self is still very much entangled in her attachment to her mother.

Annie does learn to appropriate storytelling in order to experiment with identities that are not supported by her mother. She lies about playing marbles, an activity not deemed proper for girls. She lies to spend time with a friend who her mother does not like. One day, her mother questions her whereabouts after she comes home late, having spoken to Mineu a male friend: "It would please me to hear an excuse from you." This

statement, in effect asks Annie to create an excuse for her tardiness when Mrs. John knows very well what Annie was up to. Annie complies, telling Mrs. John a story about her devotion to school: “I said something about being kept late for extra studies. I then went on to say that my teachers believed that if I studied hard enough, by my sixteenth birthday I might be able to take final exams and so be able to leave school” (102).

Annie’s meta-textual comments of “I said something about...I then went on” highlights the use of her story-telling to deceive. Mrs. John again asks for an excuse: “Perhaps if I ask again this time I will get a *straight* answer” [my emphasis] (102). Mrs. John is asking for an answer that is both truthful and upright. She has internalized the colonial mentality that associates the black female body with unrestrained sexuality (Alexander 52), and so she questions her daughter’s choice to have a conversation with a boy. She calls Annie a slut, her prejudice akin to a re-colonization of her daughter. Annie replies, “like father like son, like mother like daughter” (*AJ* 102). In this response, Annie refuses to cave to her mother’s wishes for her to become lady-like and proper. She has claimed for herself the narrative position over Mrs. John by taking Mrs. John’s technique of modeling identity on language, but twisting the mechanism so that *Mrs. John* is now implicated by Annie’s stories.

Even though Annie has manipulated narrative pragmatics to assert dominance over her mother for a moment, she has leaned on the colonial discourse that implicates the mother if the daughter is improper. This would be a valid strategy of gaining narrative dominance if she did not believe the analogy and need the security of an imposed relationship between herself and her mother. Instead, her suggestion that mother and daughter are alike indicates that she is not yet free from the need to equate the identity of

the mother and daughter. Annie will not be able to develop her own identity until she can embrace an individuality that can support making decisions and can tell stories that are not defined by what will keep her out of trouble with her mother, or merely make her feel better, but instead is what Annie wants to say.

But Annie does *not* have a sense-of-self that will allow her to make decisions that support her feelings and desires. Although she uses the syllogism of the colonial discourse to imply that her mother is a slut because of her relation to Annie, she might have found the nerve to call her a slut outright, as Annie hints that Mrs. John's relationship with her parents was just as stormy as Annie's relationship with Mrs. and Mr. John. Mrs. John moves to Antigua from Dominica because her parents would not tolerate her living on her own, because it would tarnish her moral image and theirs. Regardless of Annie's instincts about her mother's hypocrisy, she participates in committing actions against her own best judgment for the sake of her mother:

My mother brought me my lunch. I took one smell of it, and I could tell that it was the much hated breadfruit. My mother said not at all, it was a new kind of rice imported from Belgium, and not breadfruit, mashed and forced through a ricer, as I thought...I ate my meal. The more I ate of it, the more I was sure that it was breadfruit. When I finished, my mother got up to remove my plate...My mother said, "You just ate some breadfruit. I made it look like rice so that you would eat it. It's very good for you, filled with lots of vitamins"...When she laughed, her mouth opened to show off big, shiny, sharp white teeth. It was as if my mother had suddenly turned into a crocodile. (*AJ* 84)

This passage is important for a few reasons: first, it is the point at which Annie is at the depths of disillusion before she descends into a depression. Second, in light of novels such as Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* and Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* in which foods of the Caribbean are incorporated into the story in ways that are symbolic of the fertility of the islands, Annie's rejection of breadfruit is

surprising. In light of Kincaid's constant reminders that neither the Caribbean community nor the family is to be considered "safe" for the individual out of naïve attachment to the Caribbean, the inclusion of breadfruit as the contested food only seems realistic. One might *almost* be tempted to make an analogy between Annie's experience and the experience of children everywhere who do not want to eat what their parents want them to, but that would be a mistake. Annie's eating the breadfruit that she hates represents violence to the body and the core of her feelings. She disbelieves her own certainty that she is eating breadfruit in order to accommodate her mother. She eats it anyway, only for her mother to laugh off Annie's feelings of betrayal. Even though Mrs. John seems to want Annie to grow up, she has rejected her bodily integrity, as well as her ability to act on her own knowledge.

At this point, it is interesting to make a comparison between Annie and Xuela. Having seen a classmate drown while swimming out to meet a naked woman who appeared in a river and then disappeared, Xuela writes of her schoolmates who also saw the woman: "they no longer believe what they saw with their own eyes, or in their own reality. Our experience cannot be interpreted by us; we do not know the truth in it...I believed in that apparition then and I believe in it now" (*Autobiography* 38). Annie at this point seems to be in the same position of disbelieving her experience that Xuela's classmates were in in this passage. Xuela, however resisted the insistence of her father that belief in her own experience was impossible. She writes that she did believe: "But it was not to him that I insisted on the reality I knew" (50).

Patricia Mann's concept of agency can help us understand what is keeping Annie and Xuela's classmates from telling their own stories, and why it seems like they have no

agency to believe what they have seen with their own eyes. She defines agency as the ability to perform an action out of motivation, responsibility or expectation of reward (7). The aim of her book, *Micro-politics*, is to outline the rubrics for a new American society that is based on “engaged individuals” which she suggests should take the place of the western concept of the liberal individual. She argues that though in theory, the concept of the liberal individual includes women as being equal, the reality has always been that they were “incorporated selves” whose agency was defined by responsibility in the private sphere, while their husbands were free to act based on motivation (desire) or expectation of reward (capital) (125). She makes the argument that women under western liberalism have always had the agency to be “incorporated selves” to the male individual. In fact, women had a *responsibility* to perform the personal services that kept the liberal man able to maintain his position in the world to conduct transactions in the way of expending desire and collecting capital as a disinterested individual (46). And in theory, these women were assumed to have the desire—to *want*—to perform these personal services including bearing and rearing children. The importance of all of this for this paper is that Mann outlines a concept of agency that explains that agency cannot be created or destroyed; it can only be misplaced or misdirected.

The problem comes when an individual has a responsibility to do something without the desire (which she calls motivation). Mann writes that responsibility—the feeling that one ought to do something—without desire or reward is oppressive. If a person acts, that person must have agency; but all types of agency are not equal. This concept of misplaced agency links the ideological control of western colonialism—the control over narratives—with the self-doubt that leads to the inability of the individual to

act in her own self-interests since narrative domination leads to the inability of the individual to formulate a sense of self. The cycle is self-reinforcing, but Kincaid's texts suggest that the narrative domination of history can be broken if the individual can realign what she feels like she *ought* to do with what makes sense to do for her own desire or profit.

Annie needed her mother's confirmation that the food was, in fact, breadfruit before she could know for sure. One could argue that Annie is not able—that she does not have the agency—to decide to believe her own sensory experience. But it would be more useful to see the ways in which she has merely been trained to trust herself only when that self is supported by its connection to her mother, who in turn was trained to trust herself only when that self is supported by colonial discourse. She had been able to weather her mother's designation of her as slut—value judgments like that might be hard for a young girl to dispute or to recognize as irrational. Her mother convinced her to betray her own senses, and this betrayal is an acute threat to the self. In order for Annie to mature, she needs to realign her agency with the will of an identity that she can depend on. For a brief moment, her senses become detached from reality so that the image of her mother turning into a crocodile is based completely on her subjectivity and causes the first departure from the realism portrayed in the book. Even though she is enraged and is again rewriting the narrative of her mother as she did when she implied that Mrs. John is a slut, Annie is now connected to her mother through hatred rather than love or desire for attachment, and is unable to take control of hatred as a narrative.

Walking home from school shortly after the breadfruit episode, she looks at her reflection in a store window, and the window projects back to her an unwelcome image.

She first notices her head and eyes, which were too big and wide open. Her plaits stuck out under her hat and her image made her think of *The Young Lucifer*, a painting of Lucifer, just thrown out of heaven, “standing on a black rock all alone and naked...His skin was coarse, and so were all his features. His hair was made up of live snakes, and they were in a position to strike” (94). Although Annie emphasizes a mutual dejected loneliness in the image of Lucifer, her identification with Lucifer can be understood to foreshadow an eventual alliance. Lucifer has a long history of resisting the imposed standards of propriety that Western society values, and it is with this resistance in mind that he is cast in another of Jamaica Kincaid’s semi-autobiographical novels, *Lucy*, in a more revelatory light. Lucy’s mother says, “I named you after Satan himself. Lucy, short for Lucifer.” To this Lucy narrates, “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” (*Lucy* 152). In *Lucy*, Lucifer is a powerful model and is in *Annie John* as well even though Annie does not yet know that she can adopt his image as a model for resistance.

Kincaid juxtaposes this image of Lucifer on the rock with the nightmare that Annie has had previously of her mother sitting on the rock in the ocean, so Lucifer represents a surrogate mother as well—or perhaps another more resistant side of the “saintly” Mrs. John that she is hesitant to show to Annie. Simone Alexander writes about Kincaid’s use of “othermothers” as models of resistance in Kincaid’s work. She notes that “othermothers” are common within Caribbean female coming-of-age novels: “the surrogate or othermother is not as emotionally intertwined with her surrogate daughter as the biological mother, and this minimal distancing seemingly gives her a better, wiser,

and less emotion-driven perspective on the mother-daughter relationship” (Alexander, 49). They often are able to initiate the adolescent woman into sexual maturity without caring about being deemed morally backwards. Alexander says that Ma Chess, Annie’s grandmother, serves this purpose. Annie begins menstruating, and this is the final marker of her passage into womanhood. Although Lucifer becomes for her an othermother image of value for rational identity formation, she sees in him loneliness instead of resistance. She is still unable to break free of her mother and colonial prejudice against the black female body, which she has now undeniably acquired. Since before she was born, her body has been overdetermined by her mother and colonial prejudice. She literally does not know what to do with her self. She falls into a depression that puts her in a dream-like state because she cannot pass into womanhood without a rebirth to an othermother who will break the equation between the mother who mothers her and the mother that stifles her identity by imposing colonial discourse, and Annie’s attachment to both.

For this purpose, Annie will use the image of her grandmother, Ma Chess. In reality, Annie’s hallucinations grow more severe as her senses become more detached, subjective, and therefore based on a nascent self still in need of love and reassurance. Annie sees her mother’s shadow but assumes that she is Ma Chess because of the worried mother’s enactment of special care. Annie often indicates that Mrs. John is hypocritical, having one set of rules for herself and another for Annie. This suggests that Annie suspects that Mrs. John is more resistant to colonial discourse than she lets on. She splits Mrs. John into two so that she can use the resistant images of Mrs. John as Lucifer or the feisty Ma Chess that are productive to her identity formation without having to deal with the unproductive image that tricks her and subjects her to colonial interference. Mrs. John

is unable to allow Annie independence for fear that Annie's behavior will bring shame to her. Annie's manifestation of her mother as Ma Chess is more able to cope with the demands of patriarchal hegemony—Annie notes that her version of Ma Chess has nothing to do with Mr. John who Annie feels in competition with for her mother's affection. Ma Chess can lie down next to Annie at this time of transition, and the women can share an emotional connection without regard to the supposed sexual impurity of the black female body. Ma Chess gives Annie the symbolic birth that Mrs. John is not strong enough to give her when Annie is well and testing her limits. Annie is able to narrativize Mrs. John so that she can get the mixture of bodily and identity affirmation that she needs to support an identity that rejects the limitations that colonial discourse, through over-determination of the black female body, puts on Annie's ability to create her own meaning.

Annie comes out of her depression and decides to leave Antigua, but not before asserting her new fully formed identity. She is now an expert at creating her own stories, designed to have an effect on others rather than disguise for herself her own feelings of incompleteness. She writes

Why, I wonder, didn't I see the hypocrite in my mother when over the years, she said that she loved me and could hardly live without me, while at the same time proposing and arranging separation after separation, including this one, which unbeknownst to her, *I* have arranged to be permanent? So now I, too, have hypocrisy, and breasts (small ones), and hair growing in the appropriate places, and sharp eyes, and I have made a vow never to be fooled again. (133)

She may tell truths or lies, but knows exactly what she wants and will only say or act in ways that effect her own desires. Of her decision to leave, she writes that she wanted to get away from the stories told her about her, and that her decision cannot be based on words: "If I had been given years to reflect and come up with the words of why I felt this

way, I would not have been able to come up with so much as the letter ‘A.’ I only knew that I felt the way I did, and that this feeling was the strongest thing in my life” (134).

Whereas words and narratives can be used for their effect on others, Annie has learned that her own desire and motivation will lead her to trust her own judgments and that these desires do not have to be explained to anyone—an insight which Xuela has at a very early age. Because Xuela is not initiated into a family community that erodes her sense of self and ability to resist, she learns all too quickly the lesson that Annie must learn only after great struggle in detaching herself from love that is also oppressive, and the lesson that is at the premise of Lyotard’s “Lessons in Paganism:” “We have always already been told something, and we have always already been spoken. We are weak and the gods exist because we didn’t win” (137). There is no ability to institute a community narrative without recreating hegemonic control of the narratives that individuals can express. Kincaid suggests that individuals make their own desires their end so that when communities—like clouds—form and disperse, the ultimate “rationality” behind individual’s participation in them will be the motivations of those individuals who are wise enough to manufacture both strategic alliances and strategic dissimulations and are suspicious enough to be wary of being fooled.

A final note about Kincaid’s intervention into criticism of resistance literature in the Caribbean: In the introduction, I set out to show that although critics have been puzzled or frustrated by Kincaid’s lack of responsibility to the Caribbean, the community, nation, history and heritage, this resistance to responsibility is precisely her point. Patricia Mann’s theory for promoting agency on the micropolitical level aims to minimize action undertaken solely out of a feeling of responsibility. Mann argues that unless an individual

acts with a sense of motivation (desire) or expectation of reward, the action will be an oppressive one. According to Mann's model of creating engaged individuals by aligning action, motivation and reward, there is a danger in the search for a formula for "agency" or "subjectivity" in the Caribbean. This danger is looming (in the case of critics who disregard Kincaid) in the criticism of Caribbean individuals who are expressing some aspect of the Caribbean condition without careful critique of the assumptions that lead to that critique. Literary analysis must be careful to never stipulate a universal for how agency is created that does not place desire at the very heart of it, lest an individual feel responsible to uphold it rather than desire to use it in a way that makes sense to her. This would model a false notion of agency, while in reality masking a more deceptive type of oppression. It is because of Kincaid's observance of individual desire and motivation above all that allows her to create novels that display the power of her self-assured women.

Kincaid's writing does break out of the Caribbean modernist and nationalist expectations for creating agency. Although it stands to reason that critics would be wary of postmodern critique as another grand-narrative of western discourse, Lyotard would suggest that these critics should be wary, but they should also take advantage where they can. He writes:

Opportunity is the mistress of those who have no masters, the weapon of those who have no arm, and the strength of the weak, amen. It is not simply a contemporary and unexpected relationship between powerful established narrative apparatuses and the interference of a strange little history, a minor history which momentarily nonplusses them. So, alternate between harassing the State and harassing capital. Attack them by attacking their pragmatics. And if it is at all possible to do so, use one to attack the other. ("Lessons" 152)

In the end, Kincaid's intervention is not the equation between the mother and Mother Country, nor the suggestion that individuals should think about the effects that history has had on the community, nor even that resistance is in every action. Neither pledges of allegiance to the nation nor the community will save the individual from a living death of re-enacted oppression. The revolutionary message of Kincaid's writing is that the power to resist will only be found in engaged individuals who act to bring about a desired outcome.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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