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From Longing to Loss: Mother-Daughter Relationships in the Novels of Jamaica Kincaid

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FROM LONGING TO LOSS: MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIPS IN THE
NOVELS OF JAMAICA KINCAID

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ABSTRACT

Jamaica Kincaid’s semi-autobiographical novels give voice to the women of the British West Indies. Through her principal female characters within *Annie John*, *Lucy*, and *The Autobiography of my Mother*, Kincaid explores the long-lasting effects slavery and colonialism have had on the psyche of the West Indian woman. Issues of patriarchy are combined with conflicting cultural perspectives to create heroines who cannot look forward without looking back. For these characters the past is ever present, and the struggle for identity is conflated with the struggle to separate themselves from their colonial pasts.

The struggle for separation from the colonial past is symbolized by the heroines’ struggles with their mothers, whom each woman has difficulty separating herself from. Sigmund Freud, in his quest to document female sexual development, concludes “normal” development occurs once the young female transfers her desire from the mother to the father. However, these strong mother-daughter bonds stem from a pre-verbal fixation on the part of the daughter for the mother that the young woman is unable to grow out of, much less transfer her affections to her father. Within Kincaid’s three texts we discover heroines who persevere in their fixations for their mother well into young adulthood, generally lasting until puberty occurs, when these young women relocate their adoration into feelings of hate and betrayal for their mothers. The mothers and mother figures in these three texts are painted as all powerful, all knowing, and all encompassing in terms of their far-reaching impact on their daughters, similar to the deep-penetrating effects of slavery and colonialism on the islands of Dominica and Antigua.

Kincaid’s works have been analyzed from a psychological feminist point of view before, though the work of Sigmund Freud has never been used in this way to help trace the development of her female characters. It seems Kincaid’s heroines present us with an Oedipus complex that has been turned on its head: her heroines express long-lasting desire for their mothers, while their fathers are relegated to the peripheries of their lives and affections. We never see evidence of the transferal of affection from mother to father; rather once puberty begins these women begin to resent the subservient positions of their mothers and find Oedipal replacements for their affections.
These works trace the lives of the three heroines through their struggles with and alienation from their mothers, and the subsequent migrations these struggles lead to. Through the course of this paper I will trace the effects these Freudian pre-verbal fixations have had on Kincaid’s heroines and their families, and how these relationships serve as metaphors for the greater West Indies and their struggle for freedom and independence from their sordid pasts.
INTRODUCTION

Jamaica Kincaid’s coming of age novels expound on a very particular brand of motherhood and the familial relationships it breeds. Kincaid is interested in a mother-daughter relationship that is strained to the point of silence and severed ties, a relationship that begins with an abundance of unconditional love that later abruptly morphs into one of competitive loathing. These female relationships are characterized by heroines who feel intense and overwhelming love for their mothers, which is later contrasted by feelings of all consuming, blinding hatred. This is a dynamic Kincaid explores within Annie John (1983), Lucy (1990), and The Autobiography of My Mother (1997). Kincaid also works with a specific type of heroine in these three novels. This is a heroine who is aware of her “dark” past and the horrific circumstances that brought her ancestors to the West Indies. Each of these young women is also deeply intuitive and, with age, increasingly self-reliant. While the women these characters become are different from one another, the similarities in their upbringing and family are numerous. Indeed, a central component of each of these novels lies in the discovery and exploration of the main female characters’ dichotomous relationships with their families – and with their mothers in particular.

Awareness of the mounting frailty and tenuousness of these connections always finds the main characters smack in the middle of puberty. As each character (Annie, Lucy, and Xuela) examines her changing relationship with her family, she is simultaneously exploring her own sexuality and sense of place in the world as an adult woman. Rather than forever mirroring and following in the footsteps of her mother as a “little me,” Kincaid’s heroines struggle to configure their own sense of place in the world, a place far removed (both emotionally and physically) from the overbearing presence of their mothers (Annie John 26).

The goal of this thesis is to explore the changing familial relationships and subsequent migration of Kincaid’s heroines from a psychological perspective, and to examine how Kincaid creates a new voice for the postcolonial Caribbean woman. This will be done, using psychoanalytical works from Sigmund Freud and Jane Flax to theoretical works from Carole Boyce Davies and Roni Natov, in three sections:
First I will examine the nature of the pre-pubescent parent/child relationships in *The Autobiography of My Mother*, *Annie John*, and *Lucy*. Annie’s and Lucy’s mothers initially seem to have unquestioning, doting, and boundless love for their daughters. In turn, the daughters worship and revere their mothers. Father figures are, if present, unimportant and unnecessary. However, once the girls enter puberty things between mother and daughter change immediately, leading to bewildered emotional, and later physical, separation. I will also discuss Xuela’s slightly different upbringing and her amorphous relationship with her family.

In the second section I will focus on the preverbal roots that affect the heroines’ familial relationships in Sigmund Freud’s Oedipal complex. Freud bases the description of this psychological condition on the Greek tragedy *Oedipus Rex*, in which the main character fulfils his fate as the murderer of his father and the husband of his mother. As noted above, Kincaid’s three texts present us with familial situations that might be wrongly identified as examples of the Oedipal complex. One would be mistaken on the grounds that the characters’ mothers are the sole objects of their desires, while the fathers in each of these families play minor supporting roles. Because Kincaid’s characters are bound not only to their mothers but to their motherlands as well, the postcolonial conditions of their upbringing have clearly affected the ways in which they have attached (and later detached) themselves to their families.

The third section of this thesis will deal with the relationship between the severed ties of parent and child and the subsequent migrations that the three heroines embark on. Like a smaller version of the relationship between colonist and colonized, Kincaid’s heroines yearn to move beyond the boundaries of their small islands and suffocating family life. In order for these women to find their own, autonomous place in the world they must cut ties with their families and the past and rediscover themselves in new landscapes. By removing them from their colonial heritage as well as the yoke of the (mother)land and inserting them in new and strange domains, Kincaid is questioning how colonial subjects can reinvent themselves today.

I will conclude by applying Freud’s concept of the male Oedipal complex to Kincaid’s female characters in an attempt to better trace the development of her three heroines. Examination of Kincaid’s characters in this light will also help us better enter a
transmigrational discussion within these texts, addressing Kincaid’s overall quest to locate her female Caribbean subjects.

In an effort to understand the uniquely complicated familial relationships in Kincaid’s novels, many critics have attempted to analyze the development of her characters through psychological readings. Louis F. Caton, who argues *Annie John* is best read as a *Bildungsroman*, or coming of age text, points out that many of these “psychological essays attempt to understand how Annie John, the lead character, could at the same moment both love and hate her mother with equal intensity” (125). Rather than focusing on such “developmental readings” alone, Caton uses *Bildungsroman* in conjunction with psychological readings to help trace Annie John’s quest for self-identity.

The developmental readings Caton refers to abound. As he points out, critics such as Susan Kenny and Roni Natov read Kincaid’s novels, particularly *Annie John*, as fully developed psychological studies. Of Natov’s “Mothers and Daughters: Jamaica Kincaid’s Pre-Oedipal Narrative,” Caton says,

Natov’s essay illustrates the general academic preference in *Annie John* criticism to read Kincaid’s parent-child plot through non-masculine, non-oedipal based psychological terms. All of the critics I examine attempt to explain Annie John’s quest for identity in relation to this dynamic, post-Freudian emphasis on bonding metaphors. Clearly, these strategies have advantages over the older, male-centered, Freudian vocabulary. (127)

Though Caton’s assertion that many critics of Kincaid’s work tend to work from a “non-masculine’ perspective is certainly astute, I find many of them, including Natov, do in fact work from Oedipal-based psychological perspectives. This perspective is located in Freud’s “female Oedipal complex,” which many critics employ to understand Kincaid’s characters from a more feminine psychological perspective. “Bonding metaphors,” a term Caton focuses on in relation to psychologist Jane Flax, provides him with an alternative to the seemingly obvious female Oedipal complexes that surface within Kincaid’s work, creating a useful differentiation from his work and the female Oedipal-based work of other critics like Natov.
While the current trend in psychological readings, as demonstrated by Caton’s own work, may sometimes veer from a strict Freudian analysis, using a new lens to view Freud’s pre-verbal complexes is useful in going beyond character development into new terrain that creates room for Caribbean transmigrational discussion. Instead of examining Kincaid’s heroines through the prescribed lens of the female Oedipal complex, I believe it is possible and indeed useful to view her characters from a different sort of Oedipal perspective. Because I see little textual support for female Oedipal complexes within Kincaid’s texts, I think a better explanation for the development of her characters might lie in understanding them from a classic Freudian interpretation of the Oedipal complex.

In “The Conflict between Nurturance and Autonomy in Mother-Daughter Relationships and within Feminism,” Flax describes early mother-child bonding as integral to the eventual independence of the child. Theoretically, early connections between mother and child should better prepare the child for separation from her parents by providing her with a strong emotional foundation. This sense of self-worth gained from infant connections should leave the child better equipped to gain self-identity and autonomy. However, Flax sees in many of her patients an inability of daughters to separate themselves from their mothers, just as our three heroines do within Kincaid’s texts.

Relationships between family members shift as our heroines make the transition into adulthood. Rather than viewing their parents through the eyes of unquestioning loyalty, they begin to see them as the people they really are. Of the moment Xuela began to see her father as one adult sees another, she says, “But at that moment when he denied Lazarus the nails, he started to become real, not just my father, but who he might really be” (The Autobiography of My Mother 189).

As familial relationships change in these three novels, evolving sexuality becomes concurrent with widening gulfs between parent and daughter, and the adoration once reserved for the mother by the daughter is newly replaced with a greater interest in sensual and physical pleasure. While Lucy and Xuela enter into heterosexual affairs at relatively early ages, Annie has little to no interest in boys. She becomes sexually interested in a series of females who she is periodically “sure [she] couldn’t live without,” while the relationship with her father simultaneously dissipates (141).
greater interest in sexual relationships grows, communication and demonstration of love fades within the parent-child relationship. It is at this point that we realize the characters have replaced the adoration once reserved for the mother figure for “Oedipal replacements,” or new, extrafamilial outlets for their attentions.

The Oedipal presence is strong in each of these texts, though not in the pre-established Freudian set-up concerning female sexuality. It is necessary to point out that for Freud the “average” person is a Caucasian heterosexual male, the constant in his experiments. The Oedipal complex is traditionally ascribed to a male who, in his young life, longs to replace his father as his mother’s sole companion. Later, upon coming to terms with his parents’ sexuality and his own inability to “kill” and replace his father, the young boy turns in reverence for his father and develops a “normal,” extrafamilial desire for women. Thus, as some critics of Freud have noted, this explanation of the evolution of sexuality assumes male heterosexuality, with no room for or discussion of female sexual growth or homosexuality, much less postcolonial black female sexuality. Later, when pressed for an explanation of the development of female sexuality, Freud’s contemporary C.G. Jung conjured the Electra complex, in which young female adoration is centered on the father with feelings of hate and jealousy reserved for the mother. Of course, Freud rejected the title, preferring instead the “female Oedipal complex,” a condition closely linked to his work on penis envy.

Freud’s female Oedipal complex is inherently sexist and insufficient to describe the development of female sexuality in general, while the Electra complex comes with its own set of (debatable) criteria. These attempts to explain female sexuality also assume heterosexuality – but they also both require a present, active father for the female infant to attach her affections to. In the case of Kincaid’s female characters, one certainly cannot apply the Electra complex as a lens for examination, due to the lack of strong father figures and the presence of Annie John’s homosexuality. However, the parameters of Freud’s classic (heterosexual male) Oedipal complex can be applied to Kincaid’s female figures, a development that provides us with an especially interesting way to read these three novels. The sexual development, in particular, described in these pieces can be read by twisting the Oedipal complex into something that makes room for female

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1 Jacqueline Rose, Judith Butler, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar.
sexual development and homosexual desire. Female sexual desire, except in the case of Annie, eventually “matures” into what Freud describes as “normal” (hetero)sexuality. However, the heroines’ exploration of their burgeoning sexuality is often violent, emotionally hollow, and unfruitful in the very literal sense in that each woman demonstrates great resistance to becoming a mother herself, thus breaking the colonial chains of the fecund, subservient Caribbean wife/mother.

These novels trace not only the mutating relationships between parent and child, but the eventual physical separation and subsequent migrations that these changes lead to. Of the abrupt break between parent and child during adolescence, Carole Boyce Davies notes:

The mother’s seemingly brutal way of instituting this break produces emotions in the daughter which border on hatred, but actively produce an intense love/hate sequence with much pain and rejection for both women. Separation and loss throughout these texts follow a pattern of repetition which produce her migration at the end of Annie John and the subsequent departures that are central to Lucy. (125)

Indeed migration and “departures” are central to all of these works as a means of Kincaid’s heroines obtaining anonymity. Physical separation between parent and child eventually leads to the heroine gaining greater autonomy, though it also leads to virtual dissolution of any familial communication and ties.

The dominant trend in Jamaica Kincaid criticism has been to examine each of her texts on an individual basis in an attempt to understand how she gives voice to Caribbean women. However, I feel because the similarities between each of these three novels are so numerous it makes more sense to examine them holistically. When questioned by Dwight Garner of Salon about her tendency to continue to work with young women from the West Indies who are coming of age, Kincaid says that her work might be “to be seen to be of one whole cloth – that all I write is a further development of something” (2). It seems clear to me that in order to fully discuss one character we are by extension discussing another. This is not to say of course that all of these characters are simply reproductions of each other or that they can all be collapsed into one, but that it is
undeniable that Kincaid is working with a very specific type of female character whose experiences are unique to the Caribbean landscape from which she hails.

It is also useful to point out that these mother-daughter texts might be described as “semi-autobiographical,” as Kincaid grew up in Antigua and later emigrated to the U.S. Kincaid’s fascination with the dynamics of the Caribbean mother-daughter relationship stems from her tenuous relationship with her own mother. In her discussion with Garner of *The Autobiography of My Mother*, Kincaid determines the book is about “a fertile woman who decides not to be.” Kincaid contends this “fertile woman,” Xuela, is very much like her own mother. She says, “that is drawn from an observation I’ve made about my own mother: That all her children are quite happy to have been born, but all of us are quite sure she should never have been a mother” (2). Instead of creating characters who, like Kincaid’s own mother, produce children despite the brutal and poverty-stricken conditions into which they are born, Kincaid’s heroines work to prevent reproduction at all costs. Therefore Kincaid begins to rewrite the history of Caribbean women as one of resistance to the patriarchal trend of Caribbean motherhood.

In creating “semi-autobiographical” works Kincaid is heeding Hélène Cixous’ call for women to “write themselves,” or to give life and importance to their own stories by recording them themselves. Cixous notes that traditionally women have been “driven away” from writing as they have from their own bodies. By creating their own texts women are refusing to have their lives written for them. Kincaid, coming from a colonial history in which West Indian women have been subjugated to many forms of patriarchy, writes the true lives of Caribbean women. Instead of subscribing to patriarchal notions about the role of women and the tendency of the dominant (patriarchal, foreign) forces to silence the voices of West Indian women, Kincaid talks back. She responds to the patriarchal forces that have shaped the West Indies and subjugated West Indian women strictly to the roles of wife and mother. She creates previously unheard voices for West Indian women, giving new voice to black female experience everywhere.

Given the postcolonial tradition Kincaid is working out of, examining the development of her characters through the lens of the male Oedipal complex will help us better understand the effects colonialism has left on Caribbean women. As a direct product of colonialism, the second-class status that people of African descent have been
relegated to in the West Indies and the ramifications of slavery before that, have left Caribbean families in Kincaid’s work in a shambles. Creating and using psychoanalytic readings of Kincaid’s mother-daughter relationships can lead us to a fuller understanding of the development of Caribbean families and the characterization of Caribbean women.
CHAPTER 1. TENUOUS TIES: YEARNING, LOVE, AND HATE

The attachment, spiritual and physical, that a mother is said to have for her child, that confusion of who is who, flesh and flesh, that inseparableness which is said to exist between mother and child – all this was absent between my mother and her own mother.

(Lucy 199)

One of the most pervasive themes within Annie John, Lucy, and The Autobiography of My Mother is the spiritual and bodily connectedness between mother and daughter. This is a connection that goes beyond time and space and is felt even across oceans and despite death. Kincaid traces these relationships from childhood adoration through pubescent anguish, all the way to the subsequent migrations that strife within these relationships leads to.

VISCERAL PRE-VERBAL CONNECTIONS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Annie John’s second chapter, “The Circling Hand,” begins with a lengthy description of Annie’s childhood relationship with her mother. From the time she is born until her twelfth year Annie and her mother (Annie Sr.) are nearly inseparable. Particularly during the summers, while Annie is out of school, the two spend almost all of their time together. Annie is permitted to follow her mother around, “ever in her wake,” as she completes the daily household tasks (17). This is not because Annie was necessarily much help, but “it was just to include [her] in everything” (17).

The boundless love between Annie and her mother is particularly clear when, in the course of a good cleaning, Annie Sr. cleans out Annie’s trunk. This trunk contains every single article of use and importance in Annie’s life – some as momentous as christening outfits and others as mundane as baby bottles. Every piece of evidence in each stage of Annie’s upbringing and major life events are there: pictures, items of clothing, favored toys and trinkets. In the trunk “there was a thermos in which my mother had kept a tea that was supposed to have a soothing effect on me; there was the dress I wore on my first birthday: a yellow cotton with green smocking on the front; there was the dress I wore on my second birthday,” and the list goes on. Annie describes how her mother would periodically choose a section of their house to scour, and the process is the same when she cleans the old trunk:
If I was at home when she happened to do this, I was at her side, as usual. When she did this with the trunk, it was a tremendous pleasure, for after she had removed all the things from the trunk, and aired them out, and changed the camphor balls, and then refolded the things and put them back in their places in the trunk, as she held each thing in her hand she would tell me a story about myself. (21)

Though Annie has heard all of these stories before, she never tires of listening to them, for they represent how much her mother loved her from the very beginning of her life, and how much care she has put in to documenting Annie’s young life. Annie’s mother left nothing out in her collection of Annie’s past: “No small part of my life was so unimportant that she hadn’t made a note of it, and how she would tell it to me over and over again” (22).

Beyond the perceived feelings of inherent “motherlove,” Annie also expresses ideas concerning the lack of mental and bodily separation between her and her mother. Annie describes feeling physically connected to her mother in her recollection of the trip she took with her mother to Rat Island: “when we swam around this way [with Annie attached to her mother’s back, clinging to her shoulders as she swims], I would think how much we were like the pictures of sea mammals I had seen, my mother and I,” (42). Annie sees herself and her mother as one being. They are so close that to an onlooker they might even look like one creature.

Indeed, the concept of mother and daughter as one being is prevalent in all three of these novels. At many points in each text we take note as the heroine mentions that she is often unsure of where her own body begins and where her mother’s ends. Of her ties to her mother Lucy says her own past belongs to her mother, and that she can always hear her voice. The voice of Lucy’s past speaks to her not in any audible language one might understand, or “any language that needed help from the tongue; she spoke to [her] in a language anyone female could understand. And I was undeniably that – female” (90). Lucy attributes her very femaleness as linking her to her mother, as she goes on to say, “I had spent so much time saying I did not want to be like my mother that I missed the whole story: I was not like my mother – I was my mother” (90). This inability to
determine where one’s body ends and the other’s begins is a common problem
psychologist Jane Flax sees in her own patients.

In “The Conflict Between Nurturance and Autonomy,” Flax describes the agreed
upon psychological stages one must go through in order to gain independence of one’s
parent. According to Flax, many psychologists affirm that during the first few weeks
after birth the infant creates a strong connection with the primary caregiver, generally the
mother. This bond becomes so strong that Flax contends the infant acts as if her and her
mother were one being, or “a dual unity within one common boundary” (173). At this
stage in early childhood the infant is extremely sensitive to her mother’s moods,
highlighting Flax’s notion that “I and not-I are not yet differentiated and inside and
outside the self are only gradually distinguished” (173). Flax goes on to describe how
this closeness should eventually develop into a “normal” child/parent relationship, in
which the mother can enjoy the bond she has with her child but not lose her sense of self
or “smother” the child completely. However, many of her female patients have described
an inability to break from their mothers: “women in therapy have frequently said that
they have no sense of where they end and their mothers begin, even in a literal, physical
way” (174).

As young women, both Lucy and Annie repeatedly reflect on their concern that
they are not sure where their own selves stop and where their mothers begin. It is as if
despite birth and expulsion from the womb mothers and daughters are still connected in a
very visceral way. In his discussion of the mother-daughter relationship in Annie John,
Louis F. Caton explains the theory of bonding psychology as early maternal nurturance
that eventually, in a “healthy” way, leads to separation of the self from one’s mother.
Therefore it

configures nurturance as so empowering that it aids in both union with the
mother and separation from her. In so doing, the theory does not position
paradox as the generating force behind a child’s desire to bond and
divorcer herself from a mother…Instead, these critics [Jane Flax, Donna
Perry] portray the forces as complimentary actions, forces which
positively construct each other. (128)
According to this line of thinking, young women (like Annie and Lucy) who were loved so intensely from their births should pass through this stage and become independent of their mothers easily. With all of this early nurturance transition into autonomous adulthood should be painless. However, this is not the case at all. Because Annie and Lucy grew up with such a tight bond between themselves and their mothers, the separation that begins to occur about the time of puberty is all the more heart-wrenching and surprising. Both women come to see their mothers as “hypocrites;” women who claimed to love them unconditionally, but who later separate themselves from their daughters with apparent ease. “Such a clash between psychological theory and Annie John’s experiences opens possibilities for readings that focus on integration rather than singularity” (129). One such possibility is examining preverbal psychological theory in conjunction with the specifically anti-colonialist tradition Kincaid is working out of.

In “Speaking in (M)Other Tongues,” Giselle Liza Anatol examines the language of Kincaid’s characters in *The Autobiography of My Mother*. She explains that Kincaid is working from a literary and social tradition in which maternity and gender have been “manipulated in the name of an anti-colonial, Caribbean project. Her novels exemplify the idea that an unproblematic representation of biological motherhood seems near to impossible for Caribbean women” (938). The struggles of biological and surrogate motherhood as illustrated in Kincaid’s texts circle “round and round the troubled concept of motherhood, constantly replaying a situation of loss, longing, lack, and unanswerable desire” (938). An “unproblematic representation” of mother is indeed impossible for the characters in these novels, simply because so many other issues are linked to Caribbean motherhood. The trials of postcolonialism and the ghosts of slavery frequently appear, and motherhood itself is linked to patriarchy. The mothers and mother figures themselves frequently serve as members of the patriarchy, while the institution of motherhood (and all that is socially ascribed to that state of being) also appears as a manifestation of patriarchy. In line with the tradition Kincaid is working out of, motherhood as expressed in these novels is also analogous to subservience and the loss of the mother’s individuality. Though Anatol only discusses biological motherhood, it is also clear that non-biological motherhood is also continuously problematic within Kincaid’s works. Rather than ascribing traditional values to motherhood such as safety,
comfort, love, and kindness, the biological mothers and mother figures within Kincaid’s work represent something much darker and oppressive for her heroines.

Like Kincaid’s own personal sentiments toward her native Antigua itself as expressed in *A Small Place*, the three heroines in these novels remember what their relationships were like with their mothers before they were compromised by puberty. They long for this preverbal connection in which mother and daughter ebb and flow in and out of each other with no great distinction between the two. After the points in their lives where they lose this connection they each carry with them an unanswerable desire for their mothers and an inability to feel real love for anyone else, as if loss of motherlove means loss of the ability to love at all.

**AWAKENING RESENTMENT**

The detailed discussion of unpacking and repacking Annie’s trunk becomes particularly important in terms of its symbolism concerning the abrupt change in Annie’s relationship with her mother. As the summer of her twelfth year progresses, Annie begins to notice physical changes within her own body. She exhibits all the tell-tail signs of puberty: she realizes her clothes no longer fit her, she has begun to grow pubic hair, her limbs appear to be growing at a rapid rate. Annie has even noticed changes in her body odor, “as if I had turned into a strange animal” (25). Despite all of these visible and normal signs of growth, Annie nor her parents mention anything about the transition until Annie Sr.’s birthday. The usual gift Annie Sr. receives from Mr. John is fabric for new dresses for both her and Annie. While they are out shopping Annie selects a fabric she feels will suit both her and her mother’s new dresses. In a very serious tone Annie Sr. replies, “Oh, no. You are getting too old for that. It’s time you had your own clothes. You just cannot go around the rest of your life looking like a little me” (26). This response sweeps the ground from under Annie’s feet, and the severity of the statement shocks her. The change of attitude her mother displays toward her has come without warning, without notice that puberty might require a shift in the way they must act toward each other.

After the dress episode Annie is informed that she has begun the process of “becoming a young lady,” and that things between her and her mother would be different now. However, Annie Sr. “didn’t say exactly just what it was that made me on the verge
of becoming a young lady, and I was so glad of that, because I didn’t want to know” (26). Annie Sr. also refrains from telling Annie how their relationship must change, and what will characterize it now. Despite these stinging calls for change, Annie encourages her mother to slip back into their old ways when she asks to engage in the trunk ritual again. In response, “a person I did not recognize answered in a voice I did not recognize, ‘Absolutely not! You and I don’t have time for that anymore’” (27). While the first section of “The Circling Hand” details the “paradise” in which Annie lived as a child, the second part examines how this Eden quickly fades away once Annie begins to exhibit signs of puberty.

Prior to these changes Annie (as well as Lucy and Xuela) is an obedient, happy child who would never do anything to displease her parents if she could help it. However once she begins the progression toward “young ladyhood” and expectations concerning her behavior take a severe turn toward the unrecognizable, everything about her former life grates on her. The sound of her mother’s voice makes her blood curdle and she begins to do things that might intentionally differentiate herself from her mother: she plays with girls her mother would certainly disapprove of; she sneaks out of the house and becomes fluent in lies. Annie’s behavior seems to extend beyond normal teenage angst. Eventually these small rebellions feed the new hatred toward her mother.

This anger and aggression Annie feels toward her mother is reciprocated. Annie expresses her dark feelings toward her mother as a “black thing.” She and her mother both possess this thing, and sometimes they become so hateful of each other that the black thing springs from each of them and meets in the middle. Indeed, their new feelings for each other are so strong and malignant that each woman must pretend to act “in the old way” toward each other in Mr. John’s presence so as not to alert him to their true feelings. Of their changing attitudes toward one another Annie says, “My mother and I each soon grew two faces: one for my father and the rest of the world, and one for us when we found ourselves alone with each other. But no sooner were we alone, behind the fence, behind the closed door, than everything darkened” (87-88). Puberty serves as the catalyst that spurs a change in attitude between mother and daughter from feelings of symbiotic love to exasperation and anger.
Lucy explores a very similar experience for the title character. Rather than a natural and educated progression toward adulthood, our characters are abruptly confronted with adolescence with no prior warning or explanation. The physical changes that take place during puberty are not described to Lucy beforehand, and everything that subsequently happens as she crosses into “young ladydom” all come as a surprise. After discovering the growth of her own pubic hair, Lucy becomes “shocked at this sign of something I thought would never happen to me, a sign that a certain part of my life could no longer be kept secret from my mother, or other people in general; anyone could look at me and know things about me” (68). While these changes signal a “necessary” transition in the relationship between Annie and her mother, for Lucy these physical changes mean she must transform in terms of her relationship to her mother. Rather than being faced with a bewildering “new” mother whom she (like Annie) does not recognize, Lucy’s mother seems to handle the changes with ease, calm in the belief that the changes taking place are natural. When Lucy gets her period for the first time, her mother “laughed and laughed. It was a kind laugh, a reassuring laugh” (69).

Despite this calm reassurance, Lucy still deems it necessary to begin to differentiate herself from her mother at this point. Contrary to her mother’s beliefs, Lucy does everything in her power that might create difference between her and her mother, going so far as to move from the West Indies to the U.S. and vowing never to open her mother’s letters addressed to her again, eventually burning them. These attempts at difference come out of Lucy’s impression that her mother’s love for her is a “burden.” After reflecting on the unquestioning way Mariah’s children dote on their mother Lucy says of her own mother’s love that she had begun to loath the self-satisfied way her mother acted when others commented on her intense love for Lucy. She also notes, “I had come to feel that my mother’s love for me was designed solely to make me into an echo of her; and I didn’t know why, but I felt that I would rather be dead than become just an echo of someone” (36). Lucy knows that her mother would be surprised had she knowledge of these thoughts, thinking that “her ways were the best ways to have, and she would have been mystified as to how someone who came from inside her would want to be anyone different from her” (36). Annie also works to separate herself from the girl who wanted to be a smaller version of her own mother. She says,
We both noticed that now if she said that something I did reminded her of her own self at my age, I would try to do it in a different way, or, failing that, do it in a way that she could not stomach. She returned the blow by admiring and praising everything that she suspected had special meaning for me. (87)

These antagonistic relationships are the result of our heroines’ struggles to differentiate themselves from their mothers and more importantly, the circular colonial lives they symbolize.

Like Annie, Lucy’s feelings toward her mother also transition from feelings of love and bodily connectedness into those of hatred and anger:

One day, in the midst of an argument I was having with her in which I was trying to assert my will and meeting defeat again, I had turned to her and said, “I wish you were dead.” I said it with such force that had I said it to anyone else but her, I am sure my wish could have come true. But of course I would not have said such a thing to anyone else, for no one else meant so much to me. (93-94)

It is clear that for each of these characters the love they feel for their mothers simply does not disappear, but it becomes something representative of a life they no longer wish to lead. Submitting to this love is tantamount to continuing the postcolonial cycle as lived by each of the heroines’ mothers. If they accept this love and remain in their hometowns there will be no escaping the heroine living a reproduced version of her mother’s life as indifferent wife and unencouraging mother.

While we can pinpoint the exact date and reason for the change of heart between Annie and her mother, Lucy’s relationship with her mother is a bit more nebulous. Eventually through the course of the novel we come to realize that Lucy’s main issue with her mother is one of perceived betrayal. Lucy says of her parents’ expectations for her that “my father did not know me at all; I did not expect him to imagine a life for me filled with excitement and triumph. But my mother knew me well, as well as she knew herself: I, at the time, even thought of us as identical” (130). Unlike the encouragement offered to her three brothers to grow up and become anything they wanted to be, Lucy was encouraged, indeed assumed to become someone exactly like her mother. It is this
assumption and oversight on Lucy’s mother’s part that drives Lucy’s own resentment toward her family. This feeling of betrayal is particularly interesting because it demonstrates Lucy’s belief in the fact that her mother made a mistake in choosing to lead the life she did. She knows her mother has sold herself short, and she is angered at the suggestion that she might choose the same life for herself, as if she has no other options.

Unlike the relationship between Annie and her mother, Lucy’s mother is completely unprepared for the onslaught of derision that Lucy hits her with. Working under the assumption that her ways are indeed the “best” ways, she simply cannot understand why Lucy might want anything different than her own life. After her mother presents her niece Maude Quick as the ideal young woman, Lucy angrily blurts out that she would rather drop dead than still reside at home at the age of nineteen. At this point, her mother simply does not know how to react, for it had never happened before – “it was the beginning of my expressing hatred, hostility, anger toward my parents, sometimes with words, sometimes with deeds” (112).

As with Annie John, Lucy describes a great shift in thinking toward the heroine’s parents around the time of puberty. The characters’ later resistance and refusal to conform to colonial/post-colonial/patriarchal societal expectations grows out of rebellion against the mother figure.

THE DISPOSSESSION OF LOVE
I believe my entire life was without such a thing, love, the kind of love you die from or the kind of love that causes you to live eternally

(The Autobiography of My Mother 217)

As demonstrated in these three novels, Kincaid is interested in the rather grey areas between familial love, hate and indifference. While The Autobiography of My Mother differs from the previous two texts in that Xuela has grown up without her biological mother, she still exhibits all of these same traits toward other members of her “family.” These pseudo-family members include semi-surrogate mothers Ma Eunice, the businessman’s wife, Lise, with whom Xuela leaves home to live, and Xuela’s father’s second wife.

In great contrast to the other two texts, The Autobiography of My Mother’s Xuela enters the world with no mother. Xuela’s mother died giving her life, and the novel opens with her impression of this effect on her:
My mother died at the moment I was born, and so for my whole life there was nothing standing between myself and eternity; at my back was always a bleak, black wind […] And this realization of loss and gain made me look backward and forward: at my beginning was this woman whose face I had never seen, but at my end was nothing, no one between me and the black room of the world. (3)

Once her mother passes her father abandons her to the care of Ma Eunice. Her father, probably believing himself unfit to care for an infant girl, delivered Xuela, along with his dirty wash, to his laundress’s home. Ma Eunice is already a mother of six when she agrees to care for Xuela, but basic food and shelter is all Xuela receives from the washerwoman: “Ma Eunice was not unkind: she treated me just the way she treated her own children – but this is not to say she was kind to her own children. In a place like this, brutality is the only thing freely given. I did not like her, and I missed the face I had never seen (5).”

After some correspondence, Xuela’s father decides to take her from Ma Eunice’s into the home of he and his new wife. The relationships Xuela has with both Eunice and her father’s wife are however of similar importance to the direct mother-daughter relationships in the former two novels, as is the fragile and distanced relationship between her and her father. While Xuela’s familial makeup is not quite the same as Lucy or Annie’s, the results are similar and thus worth further exploration.

The Autobiography of My Mother, in which Xuela attempts to reimagine the past of the mother she never met, differs slightly from the other two texts but touches upon many of the same themes as Lucy and Annie John. One of the most important common threads in this text concerns Xuela’s “change”: as she goes through puberty Xuela’s father’s wife, who has never liked her, becomes fearful and threatened by her, just as the mothers of both Lucy and Annie change in their manners toward their pubescent daughters. After beginning her period and preparing for it by creating menstrual pads, Xuela says, “After my father’s wife saw me initiate and complete this one act, she said to me that when I became a real woman, she would have to guard herself against me” (58). For example, Xuela’s sexual power and draw in particular become increasingly important throughout the text and later provide the driving force for many of Xuela’s relocations.
As each of these three heroines progresses through adolescence they also gain greater power in their own femininity, a power which other women, even their own family members, come to feel threatened by.

Unlike Annie and Lucy, Xuela does not grow up surrounded by unconditional love. However, like the other two heroines, Xuela also lacks the ability to truly love without reservation. The loss of this motherlove, in Xuela’s case a love she lived without from the beginning of her life, while in Annie’s case it is the result of her mother turning her back on her daughter “in disgust,” cripples our heroines with an inability to deeply love anyone or anything ever again. It is as if this betrayal, this lack of familial attachment, causes each female character to decide against allowing herself to feel love for anyone else. Perhaps the risk is just too high.

**COLONIALISM AND LOVE**

In her relationship with Hugh Lucy knows that love would complicate and compromise her life too much. Though she has strong feelings of love for both Mariah and Peggy (at one point) she is unable to express this to them as well. After meeting Paul for the first time Lucy notices a strong connection between the two of them. Of the meeting she says, ‘this is usually the moment when people say they fall in love, but I did not fall in love. Being in such a state was not something I longed for” (100). Lucy is certainly aware that acquiescence in love would work against her efforts to gain autonomy in her new life, but there is something deeper at work here. It is as if in the process of shutting her family out and withdrawing her love for them she forfeits the ability to feel that strongly about anything or anyone. After Paul inevitably tells her he loves her, Lucy thinks, “So that’s what that sounds like when someone really means it. I kissed him doubly hard and instantly I knew it was a mistake, for he mistook my enthusiasm for his love returned” (118).

After Lucy leaves home she moves in with the upper class Lewis and Mariah as their family’s au pair and companion. Mariah, a woman trapped in her own privileged domesticity, easily loves Lucy from the beginning and desperately wants her to return these feelings. Cultural and economic divisions are challenging enough to overcome to create a mutually loving relationship, but because of Lucy’s postcolonial upbringing she is simply emotionally unequipped to enter such a relationship. At one point in the novel
Mariah takes Lucy to a secret field, one of her favorite places on earth, to introduce Lucy to her beloved daffodils. Upon seeing the field Lucy becomes noticeably choked up:

Mariah, mistaking what was happening to me for joy at seeing daffodils for the first time, reached out to hug me, but I moved away. This woman who hardly knew me loved me, and she wanted me to love this thing – a grove brimming over with daffodils in bloom – that she loved also. (30)

Lucy cannot reconcile her own postcolonial school lessons of daffodils with the love Mariah associates with them: “It wasn’t her fault. It wasn’t my fault. But nothing could change the fact that where she saw beautiful flowers I saw sorrow and bitterness” (30). It is as if the severing of ties with her mother and subsequently the physical removal of Lucy from the West Indies inhibits her from making true connections with others. Indeed, when Mariah tells Lucy she loves her, Lucy simply remains silent (26).

The relationship between Lucy and Mariah is also particularly complicated and stilted in Lucy’s expression of feelings toward Mariah other than anger and resentment. Lucy constantly compares Mariah to her own mother: “The times that I loved Mariah it was because she reminded me of my mother. The times that I did not love Mariah it was because she reminded me of my mother” (58). Lucy also notes on more than one occasion that Mariah is superior to her mother in a lot of ways: when Lucy becomes friends with Peggy Mariah does not try to break up the friendship, though she dislikes Peggy. Lucy is sure that her own mother simply would have forbidden such an alliance and easily put an end to it. Of Mariah’s reaction to her and Peggy’s friendship Lucy says, “That was a way in which Mariah was superior to my mother, for my mother would never come to see that perhaps my needs were more important than her wishes” (64). However, Lucy and Mariah might also be described as friends; in fact Mariah ardently wishes them to be so, and asks Lucy to think of her home as her own. Pure friendship is, of course, impossible, for Lucy has been hired to care for Mariah’s children – she is the servant and Mariah is the master. Of such a relationship Xuela says, “This Master and friend business, it is not possible; a master is one thing and a friend is something else altogether, something completely different; a master cannot be a friend. And who would want such a thing, master and friend at once?” (134).
In many ways Mariah and her family represent a colonizing force, while Lucy is the colonized. Though her efforts appear pure, Mariah works to help Lucy grow and better herself through her patronage. She provides her with books, museum passes, and much more money than the agreed upon payment Lucy was to receive for her services. However, Lucy’s own mother can be viewed as a colonizing force as well, one who works to keep Lucy in the comfortable position of island nurse, wife, and mother. Interestingly Lucy has no qualms about displaying her affection for Mariah’s children. She is free with hugs and kind words for the four towheaded girls, perhaps because coming of age has not yet compromised the way these characters view each other.

Xuela is also emotionally stoic and stunted. Through the course of The Autobiography of My Mother we see she is unable to feel maternal affection for Ma Eunice, a woman who has so many children of her own she has no love left to offer the orphaned Xuela. Of Ma Eunice Xuela says, “I never grew to love this woman my father left me with, this woman who was not unkind to me but who could not be kind because she did not know how – and perhaps I could not love her because I, too, did not know how” (5-6). These comments pose an interesting question: does one only “learn” how to love, as taught by someone else, like a nurturing parent, or is this ability essentially inherent in all of us?

Kincaid suggests that growing up in the postcolonial West Indies deprives one, perhaps everyone beyond the mothers of Annie and Lucy, of the inherent ability to love. The “brutality” of the landscape, the history, and the omnipresent poverty of both Antigua and Dominica do not lend themselves to love. Indeed, the particular landscape of the British West Indies breeds a certain type of heroine in Kincaid’s novels. This heroine, as exemplified by Annie, Lucy, and Xuela, is aware of her own dark roots and the circumstances of her own presence in this tropical land. The heroine knows that her presence in the West Indies is the result of the “foul deed” of slavery, and that the native Caribs are all but extinct.
CHAPTER 2. THE FEMALE OEDIPAL COMPLEX

Sigmund Freud’s work on female sexual development reveals a psychologist who is frequently miffed by the “abnormalities” expressed in his female patients. In his examination of the development of female sexuality, Freud notes many instances in which young female sexual growth deviates from that of little boys. These variations are particularly apparent once the little girl passes from the preverbal phase into the phallic, and later Oedipal phases, switching her attachment from her mother in favor of her father.

According to Freud, during the phallic phase children begin to notice the pleasure they might gain from their own sex organs. While children, particularly boys, might become enamored of their newfound amusement, Freud notes that these activities are quickly and frequently discouraged by the child’s mother. In the case of the young boy, this fear of displeasing his mother (the center of his desire and attachment) gives way to the “castration complex,” or the fear that in her anger over his behavior his mother will castrate him. In the case of the young girl, sexual difference (which she later comes to equate with social and physical inadequacy) is not recognized until she comes into contact with the genitals of a member of the opposite sex. Of this interaction Freud says, “The castration complex of girls is also started by the sight of the genitals of the other sex. They at once notice the difference and, it must be admitted, its significance too” (Vol. XXII 125). Unlike the young boy, who desires his mother and recognizes himself in his father, the young girl is supposed to feel betrayed and “castrated” by the mother because she has denied her a phallus: “It was, however, a surprise to learn from analyses that girls hold their mother responsible for their lack of a penis and do not forgive her for their being thus put at a disadvantage” (Vol. XXII 124). According to Freud the young girl then recognizes herself as a sexually passive figure, whose desire, like her mother, is guided by penis envy. The young girl then transfers her attachment from her mother to her father, who owns what she desires.

Even such a pared down summary of Freud’s Femininity reveals a feminine sexuality mired in loss and dejection. Freud goes on to note:

The discovery that she is castrated is a turning-point in a girl’s growth. Three possible lines of development start from it: one leads to sexual inhibition or to neurosis, the second to change of character in the sense of
a masculinity complex, the third, finally, to normal femininity” (Vol. XXII 126).

Psychologist Jane Flax also touches upon this issue, the moment of awareness of the young female to her gendered inequality. Beyond feeling sexually unequipped, Flax says when a young girl becomes aware of her gender she simultaneously becomes aware of the patriarchal system. It is at this point she learns that as a woman she is not valued equally, and “that, in fact, men are socially more esteemed than women” (173). Flax goes on to deduce that becoming aware of gender thus “entails a coming to awareness of and to some extent internalizing asymmetries of power and esteem” (173). Rather than agreeing with Freud and chalking the young female’s perceived inequality up to her lack of a phallus, Flax asserts that it is the recognition of her own social inequality, that, due to her gender, leaves her less socially esteemed. This is the point at which Freud would suggest the young girl will recognize her and her mother’s subservient position to the father/husband, and the girl will switch her attentions to her father in disappointment at the lack her mother has left her with. Freud also points out that the Oedipus complex is relatively temporary for boys because the fear of castration and the recognition of himself in his father forces him to give up his fixation on his mother and to develop normal extrafamilial desires. However, he states that what happens with a young girl is “almost the opposite” – instead of destroying the Oedipus complex as it does in the development of young boys, the castration complex actually prepares young girls for the Oedipus complex. He notes “the girl is driven out of her attachment to her mother through the influence of her envy for the penis and she enters the Oedipus situation as though into a haven of refuge” (129). According to Freud, the female Oedipal complex can last much longer in young girls. They are also believed to enter this stage as one might enter a “haven,” because she can give up her desire for and quit her frustration over not having a phallus.

In response to the perceived incomplete analysis of Freud’s description of female sexuality, his contemporary C.G. Jung coined the term “Electra complex” to better describe the above fixation. Unhappy with this departure from his original work, Freud chose instead to call the complex detailed above the “female Oedipus” complex, and disagreed with the fundamentals of Jung’s work. Freud believed Jung’s Electra ideas
showed that female sexual development parallels that of a young male, which he did not believe. Some critics might be tempted to use these two classifications interchangeably, though the origins of the categories differ, rendering these two conditions not identical. Freud’s female Oedipus complex stems from the young girl’s supposed penis envy and later resentment of her mother for her “lack,” while Jung’s concept illustrates female sexual development as a counterpart for male sexual development and the traditional Oedipus complex. Much of the work done on Kincaid’s narratives locates her heroines in the feminine Oedipus. Though for many critics the tenets of Freud’s female sexuality do not hold up, some authors find the female Oedipus complex the best way to dissect the developing sexuality of Kincaid’s heroines.

FEMALE OEDIPAL READINGS

For many critics the female Oedipus complex seems to be at work in Kincaid’s texts. Roni Natov addresses some of the implied female Oedipal longings within *Annie John* in her essay “Mothers and Daughters: Jamaica Kincaid’s Pre-Oedipal Narrative”:

> As she snuggles against her father, she is a child who has wet her bed, but on his lap she feels the stirrings of sexuality and the surfacing of oedipal feelings. “Through the folds of my nightie, I could I could feel the hair on his legs […] A funny feeling went through me that I liked and was frightened of at the same time, and I shuddered.” She retreats from these feelings, from sexuality altogether, as she returns to her original source of sustenance, her mother. (11)

It should be pointed out that Annie’s illness takes place after all of her introductory sexual experiences with her female classmates, as she functions in a world virtually void of boys. This “surfacing” of Oedipal feelings is short-lived, if present at all, and plays no role in Annie’s developing sexuality, which for the duration of the novel maintains its focus on homoerotic desire. Indeed Annie is appalled when Gwen suggests that she marry her older brother, and eventually reflects that she will “never” marry at all (133). Her feelings against the institution are so vehement that when her mother says, “Of course, you are a young lady now, and we won’t be surprised if in due time you write to say that one day soon you are to be married,” Annie states, “with bad feeling that I didn’t hide very well, ‘How absurd!’” (136).
In “Severing The (M)Other Connection: The Representation of Cultural Identity in Jamaica Kincaid’s *Annie John*,” H. Adlai Murdoch contends that the budding hatred between Annie and her mother lies in the sense of betrayal Annie feels toward her mother for her lack of autonomous identity. I contend this sense of betrayal clearly evokes Freud’s assertion of betrayal felt by the young female child upon discovering that her mother has denied her a phallus. In this echo of Freudian thought Annie is denied an autonomous identity simply because she is a young woman, thus her identity has already been preconceived as one of the “second sex.” Because she lacks a phallus, Annie’s own individual identity is overlooked. As a young woman, Annie has certain expectations demanded of her, and it is not long before Annie becomes aware of lesser social position. Marriage and motherhood are givens for her adult life as she is molded into a younger version of her mother. These expectations and assumptions in turn prevent Annie from cultivating her own individual identity apart from her mother or the other women on her island, reinforcing the patriarchal nature of her relationship with her mother.

Murdoch also sees separation of Annie from her mother as leading to Oedipal thoughts and feelings toward her father. Murdoch writes that *Annie John* focuses on the Oedipal longings Annie begins to harbor for her father, noting that Annie “will attach herself to her father, whose image, in spite of his perceived violent streak, would be seen now as less impersonal and distant, more tempered, more valorized, and a more worthwhile and dependable repository of power, in her eyes” (334). However, evidence of this attachment never materializes in the text and Annie begins preparing for her move abroad. In fact, Annie remains somewhat indifferent to her father, instead honing in on her negative feelings toward her family upon her departure for England. During her last day at home Annie reflects on her relationship with her parents as she realizes that she has changed while her parents have remained the same people they have always been. Because she has changed, “all the things [she] used to be and all the things [she] used to feel are as false as the teeth in my father’s head” (133). Instead of dwelling on her father at this point Annie only mentions him in passing to illustrate the sham she sees in her upbringing. She goes on to say: “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”
Rather than coming to the understanding that part of growing up might include separating oneself physically from her parents, Annie harps on the “forced” separation between her and her mother, mentioning her father only in passing. Throughout the entirety of the novel, Annie’s father is continuously relegated to a peripheral role in her family life. Though Mr. John built their house and every single piece of furniture in it “with his own hands,” it remains clear that Annie Sr. is the focal point of Annie’s familial sphere, and the focus of her own affections. Of her parents Annie says, “when my eyes rested on my father, I didn’t think very much of the way he looked. But when my eyes rested on my mother, I found her beautiful” (18). Annie’s father is almost a nonentity from her point of view, barring the few times Annie mentions him as a rival for her mother’s affections.

One day when her father arrives home for lunch earlier than normal, Annie comes home to find her parents already deep in conversation, and Annie’s mother only greets her “absentmindedly.” After mulling over her meal in silence she thinks,

I could not believe that she couldn’t see how miserable I was and so reach out a hand to comfort me and caress my cheek, the way she usually did when she sensed that something was amiss with me. I could not believe how she laughed at everything he said, and how bitter it made me feel to see how much she liked. (83)

It seems that they can hardly function as a threesome anymore, now that Annie has become a young lady, and her wishes for her and her mother to exist alone become increasingly potent. We also see this same detached jealousy in Lucy. Lucy, in her affection for and protectiveness over Mariah, also joylessly reflects on how Lewis constantly makes Mariah laugh: “This made Mariah laugh, but almost everything Lewis said made Mariah happy and so she would laugh. I didn’t laugh, though, and Lewis looked at me, concern on his face” (14). In both the case of Mariah and Annie Sr., Lucy and Annie are left out of the laughter that each married couple shares. The heroine looks on, focusing her thoughts on the respective wife, the husband simply someone who brings a joy to his wife’s life that neither Annie nor Lucy can be a part of.

Rather than presenting us with clean-cut Electra complexes in her texts, the relationship between Kincaid’s heroine and her mother often reads like a romantic
relationship. Mother and daughter are seen as two lovers who, through dealings with the obstacles and changes life throws at them, eventually break up and move forward. Like a romantic relationship we see the “good times,” when each party is happy and in love. This period happens to find the heroine in the prepubescent stage, before the relationship with her mother has been compromised by pending adulthood and sexuality.

Lucy’s relationship with her mother is a prime example of this romantic metaphor. After she turns nine her mother, in short progression, gives birth to three sons. After each new son was born her “mother and father announced to each other with great seriousness that the new child would go to university in England and study to become a doctor or a lawyer or someone who would occupy an important and influential position in society” (130). It is at this juncture in her young life when Lucy realizes that her parents do not hold the same hopes for her. Rather, her mother saw for her Lucy’s future “as her only identical offspring, in a remotely similar situation” (130). Because Lucy is a young girl, it is only logical to Lucy’s mother than she will lead the same kind of life she has, that of wife to an older man and mother to many children. It is at this point that the love affair between the two women collapses. Lucy, after trying to explain her complicated feelings toward her mother to Mariah, says, “My life was at once something more simple and more complicated than that: for ten of my twenty years, half of my life, I had been mourning the end of a love affair, perhaps the only true love in my whole life I would ever know” (131). Lucy eventually decides to burn all of the letters she has ever received from her mother, an act she “had read somewhere, of one lover rejecting another” (91).

It is also at this point, the severing of the mother-daughter “romantic” relationship, that each heroine begins to dismiss her mother’s position as wife and mother. In each text (Annie John, Lucy, and The Autobiography of My Mother) the heroine’s mother has married a man much older than herself. These men have had children with other women but never married any of them until their present marriage to the heroine’s mother. The husbands in turn create dangers and threats for their new families as their previous lovers try to hurt and kill his current wife and daughters. Eventually, about the time each heroine is ready to embark on her voyage from home, the father also lapses into old age and ill health, leaving the relatively young mother to care for her ageing husband.
Each of Kincaid’s heroines sees such a marital arrangement as debased and devalued, preventing each mother from reaching her full potential as an individual woman. Annie says, when Maude Quick comes to visit her and notes her likeness to her mother,

I am not like my mother. She should not have married my father. She should not have had children. She should not have thrown away her intelligence. She should not have paid so little attention to mine. She should have ignored someone like you. I am not like her at all. (123)

While this statement also highlights Lucy’s need to differentiate herself from her mother, it also illustrates her feelings concerning her mother’s marriage as a mistake, as throwing her life away to care for children and an old man. Xuela also expresses similar thoughts, though the details of her mother and father’s life together are practically all imagined, with a few factual items she has pieced together with the help of others. Xuela learns her mother, after having been abandoned by her own mother, was brought up by nuns from France who baptized her mother and “demanded that she be a quiet, shy, long-suffering, unquestioning, modest, wishing-to-die-soon person. She became such a person” (199). Xuela maintains that this “long-suffering” person was the woman her father fell in love with, for at that time in his life (before he became rich due to nefarious deeds) he felt sympathy for such a person. She goes on to say of her father’s imagined attraction to her mother that it would not have lain in beauty, but:

No, it would have lain in her sadness, her weakness, her long-lost-ness, the crumbling of ancestral lines, her dejectedness, the false humility that was really defeat […] He had by then been from island to island and fathered children with women whose names he did not remember, the children’s names he did not know at all. He must have felt when he saw her the need to stay in one place. My poor mother! (201)

Clearly Kincaid’s heroines do not perceive the position of wife and mother as a happy one, nor as their only option in life. Xuela, associating marriage with subservience, tosses Lise’s instructions on how to make the perfect cup of coffee for Monsieur LaBatte aside, saying, “I do not want to make him coffee, I shall never make him coffee, I do no need to know how to make this man coffee, no man will ever drink coffee from my hands

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made in that way!” (74). Such a life, if chosen, only leads to the indifferent dissatisfaction displayed by Annie Sr., Lucy’s mother, Lise, and Xuela’s father’s new wife.

In “Mothers and Daughters: Ancient and Modern Myths,” Ellen Handler Spitz focuses on the “mother-daughter dyad” that “relegates its male characters to the periphery” (415). In her exploration of ancient and modern myths, Spitz comes to the conclusion that husbands rarely symbolize love and happiness, as in the case with Hades and Persephone. Throughout her discussion of this ancient myth Spitz reminds the reader that it is in her relationship with her mother Demeter (the mother earth goddess) that Persephone is happiest. Of the negative symbolism of marriage she says, “marriage – in the form of Hades – is equated with brutality and death” (418). The portion of the year Persephone spends with her husband (the fall/winter, the dark and fallow seasons) finds her in hell, literally and figuratively. According to Spitz, Persephone seems to find no joy in her marriage. Rather, as Demeter and Persephone reunite, the earth blossoms into fecund green joy.

Xuela, like Persephone, also marries; however it is a loveless relationship anchored in sexual need and physical comfort. While detailing her husband’s physical features Xuela says, “He did not look like anyone I could love, and he did not look like anyone I should love, and so I determined then that I could not love him and I determined that I should not love him” (152). Spitz, as well as Annie, Xuela, and Lucy all comment on the mother/wife’s position as devalued and degraded. After meeting Madame LaBatte for the first time and recognizing in her a lack of vitality and an intense aura of “defeat,” Xuela quickly is put on her guard: “It was almost as if I sensed a danger and quickly made myself a defense; in seeing the thing I might be, I too early became its opposite” (64-65). Annie and Lucy in turn work to make something more of themselves than subordinate mother/wife.

Xuela, in her own personal discontent, chooses this life as a sort of punishment bred from anguish over the social inequality thriving in the West Indies between colonized and colonizer. Despite her technical role as wife, she fulfills the role unconventionally, starving her husband of the sound of her voice, going so far as to only respond to him in French patois instead of his native English. Her marriage to an English
doctor becomes an outlet for her own internal reveries, providing her with the material comforts of a well furnished home. She denies her husband much physical joy, reveling in his own personal demise and the defeat of his class: “He grew to live for the sound of my footsteps, so often I would walk without making a sound; he loved the sound of my voice, so for days I would not utter a word; I allowed him to touch me long after I could be moved by the touch of anyone” (218). Xuela, who is so unhappy with her own life, turns to marriage because she does not seek anything else. Unlike Annie and Lucy, Xuela feels the pain of her homeland and her people more deeply, and is also emotionally scarred by the loss of her mother. Her main concern is with herself, and by extension her mother, her husband only fulfilling a social role.

Just as Xuela’s husband plays a relatively small role in the text and within Xuela’s own personal life, the fathers in these three texts are also rarely heard from. In her contention that husband/father characters are generally unimportant to the central concerns of these mother-daughter dyad-based texts, Spitz comments on the relatively small role Annie’s father plays in the novel. While she contends he is not eliminated all together, Mr. John’s “subordinate status” is clearly represented (415). He is physically shorter than Annie Sr. and only plays a minor role in Annie’s life. Annie’s mother is inarguably the focus of her attentions throughout the text, leaving Mr. John in the peripheries.

For the women in all three of these novels the mother figure overshadows everyone else; she is the disciplinarian as well as the affectionate parent, leaving only a relatively small role for the father to fulfill, primarily as breadwinner and little else. Indeed, Lucy even comments that her father simply did not know her at all and played a very small role in her everyday life (130). Even in the case of Xuela, who lives with her father because of her mother’s death, fixates on how her mother’s presence would have changed her situation. The bond between her and her mother is so strong it pulls at her constantly, despite death and never having met her mother. Instead of attaching herself to her father she creates an “autobiography” of her mother, imagining her mother’s life, and thus her own, as it might have been. Her own disappointment and disinterest in her father is clear when she says,
He believed he loved me, but I could tell him how untrue that was, I could list for him the number of times he had placed me squarely within the jaws of death; I could list for him the number of times he had failed to be a father to me, his motherless child, while on his way to becoming a man of this world. (118)

Because of this betrayal, or perhaps despite it, Xuela never seeks her father’s approval or proof of his love. Even when she pens letters “to” her father, they are not actually meant for him, but “for the person of whom I could see only her heels. Night after night I saw her [mother’s] heels, only her heels coming down to meet me, coming down to meet me forever” (19). Xuela never intended to send the letters to her father, though their discovery and subsequent arrival in her father’s hands changed the circumstances of her life forever.

These examples help illustrate the lack of classic Oedipal feelings between father and daughter, and highlight the prominent relationships between mother and daughter. What we see in these works is actually an extended fixation on the part of the heroine for her mother, a kind of lifelong Oedipus complex – albeit on the part of a woman toward her mother – that seems to spring from the particular circumstances of growing up in the postcolonial West Indies. While still maintaining the idea that the female complex is the best way to read Annie John, Murdoch says looking at the text from the perspective of the feminine Oedipus:

provides a springboard from which to broach problems of some significance. The question of the oedipal nature of mother/daughter relationships is one which figures strongly in women authors of several bicultural contexts, and is an almost constant signifier of the struggle to establish an identity which is independent of the mother, and of the clash of cultures. (339)

Again we see the challenges facing Annie and Kincaid’s other heroines as they try to differentiate themselves from their mothers, and by extension their colonial heritage. Kincaid’s mother-daughter relationships are not limited to how these women interact with each other, but how they interact with society at large. In contrast to Murdoch, who later goes on to say that Annie (and by extension, the other heroines discussed in this
thesis) will move on to forget her mother and seek solace from her father, I argue that these mother-daughter relationships are a twisted version of the classic Freudian Oedipus. This new version finds our heroines initially “in love” with their mothers, at the early stages of their “romantic” relationships, which later develop into bonds that the heroine must break free of. The love for their mothers never disappears; it only morphs into anger once it becomes clear that mother and daughter cannot exist forever in a preverbal, pre-Oedipal Eden.

As the tension between each young woman and her mother (or surrogate mother) increases, none of these young women look to their male parent for comfort. Rather than running to her father’s arms for consolation after being “betrayed” by the mother, as a classic Freudian interpretation of the feminine Oedipus would suggest, Annie succumbs to illness and falls back into the preverbal stage, relieving her of the increasing conflict between her and her mother. She instead becomes an infant again who must be constantly cared for by her mother and grandmother Ma Chess. Annie becomes weak and childlike, unable to speak or feed herself.

The pre-Oedipal phase of development is Roni Natov’s focus in her treatment of the relationship between Annie and her mother. In discussing Annie’s pre-Oedipal adolescence Natov helps illuminate the relationship between the pre-Oedipal/preverbal phase in Annie’s life and what Freud himself describes as “normal.” In Femininity he says,

> We knew, of course, that there had been a preliminary stage of attachment to the mother, but we did not know that it could be so rich in content and so long-lasting, and could leave behind so many opportunities for fixations and dispositions. During this time the girl’s father is only a troublesome rival; in some cases the attachment to her mother lasts beyond the fourth year of her life. (Vol. XXII 119)

While both male and female children develop strong attachments to their mothers during the preverbal phase, little is said of the propensity of boys to carry on with this attachment long after the “fourth year” of life. Interestingly enough, none of Kincaid’s heroines seem to have progressed beyond the preverbal stage in the sense that they are still unfailingly attached to their mothers.
Rather than forever existing in a pre-Oedipal state, it seems that these characters, particularly Annie, have developed long-standing Oedipal complexes focused on the mother. Unlike the assertions made by Anatol and Murdoch, I argue Kincaid’s heroines do not exhibit features of the classic female Oedipal complex. Rather, the three young women in these novels reserve Oedipal longing for their mothers alone, and display symptoms of the classic (what is typically ascribed to young males) Oedipal complex. Each woman powerfully yearns for her mother beyond what is deemed by Freud, Flax, and the other psychological critics mentioned in this thesis as a normal length of time. The fixations these women harbor for their mothers are deeply rooted, and interest and affection for the father figure is almost nonexistent. Instead of heightened adoration for the father, the heroines in these novels long to exist with their mothers alone, free of the competitive presence of their fathers.

In her essay “Mothers and Daughters: Jamaica Kincaid’s Pre-Oedipal Narrative,” Roni Natov highlights the titanium bond between mother and daughter:

She [Nancy Chodorow] suggests that mothers cling tightly to their daughters out of a need to merge with an “other” in a way that remains unfulfilled in their relationships with men. The cyclical pattern in which mothers pass on to their daughters what they have received from their own mothers perpetuates the experience of the world as fluid and without boundaries. (2)

As discussed earlier, many women have noted this lack of “boundaries” between themselves and their own mothers, just as Annie and Lucy live in early symbiosis with their mothers and Xuela can write her own mother’s autobiography. Chodorow contends part of this lack of boundaries is rooted in the deep similarities between and recognition of the sameness between mother and daughter. According to her women never give up their affection for their mothers in exchange for relationships with and adoration for men, as suggested by Freud. She says that while the young girl may transfer her libidinal attachment from her mother to her father, she never fully represses her attachment to her mother. Rather, she becomes deeply attached to both parents as she “builds up her pre-Oedipal tie to her mother” (69). The relationship between mother and daughter only grows according to Chodorow because of the recognition the young girl sees of her
mother in herself. This is a “primary identification – a sense of oneness; primary love – not differentiating between her own and her mother’s interests: and extensive dependence” (69). In terms of Kincaid’s heroines these young women do not turn their libidinal attractions to their fathers, though their recognition of their mothers in themselves is abundantly clear. Natov goes on to say that,

In their identification with the mother, girls experience themselves as inextricably linked to, defined, and completed by this connection. The struggle to separate from the mother, then, is particularly wrenching for girls, for to separate is to deny the mother, which for girls is also to deny some part of the self. (2)

Desire for the mother in addition to the inability to separate oneself from the mother all become bound, preventing any “normal” development, and further problematizing the institution of postcolonial motherhood.

Normal development, characterized by the child relinquishing her penis envy in favor of a feminine Oedipal complex does not occur within these three novels. The heroines never relocate their Oedipal longings from their mothers to their fathers, and they never relinquish this initial attachment to their mothers. For Freud, normal sexual development can begin once the young boy has given up his desire to replace his father and begins to see himself in his father, thus leaving his fixation on his mother in favor of extrafamilial sexual desire. By this definition of Freudian sexual development, the heroines never progress beyond their Oedipal yearnings for their mothers, thus entering into what he describes as “normal” sexual development.

SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT WITHIN KINCAID’S TEXTS

Some critics point to the “primal scene” as the pivotal moment in a child’s sexual development. H. Adlai Murdoch discusses the term as defined in The Language of Psychoanalysis as the “scene of sexual intercourse between the parents which the child observes […] It is generally interpreted by the child as an act of violence on the part of the father” (332). Murdoch uses the scene that takes place in Annie John to argue that Annie Sr. is indeed a phallic mother (in Annie’s eyes the head of the household) who ultimately betrays Annie by her participation as a subservient sexual partner, stating, “Thus what Annie perceives is a massive, unconscionable, and inexplicable loss of power
on the part of her mother – one amounting to a betrayal – as the sole means of accounting for her succumbing to the greater physical and phallic power of the father” (333). While there may be some truth to this assertion, I would like to focus on the sense of betrayal Annie fixates on after the “primal scene” as proof of her jealousy of her father’s connection to her mother. For it is at this point that Annie recognizes her father’s importance in her mother’s life, fulfilling a role she herself cannot perform, making clear to her that she and her mother cannot exist alone in the “paradise” she was used to as a child.

The primal scene in Annie John takes place after she has begun to go through puberty and her mother has tersely told her that things between the two of them must change. “Because of this young-lady business,” Annie Sr. has begun to look unfavorably upon Annie, Annie Sr.’s expectations of her changing with Annie’s changing body (27). After weeks of growing disapproval on the part of Annie Sr. toward Annie, Annie attempts to prove herself with a certificate of merit from Sunday school. She says, “I rushed home with my certificate in hand, feeling that with this prize I would reconquer my mother – a chance for her to smile on me again” (30). However when Annie returns home, she believes the house empty until strange sounds lead her to her parents’ bedroom. Annie finds her parents making love, but her eyes are fixated on her mother’s hand circling her father’s back in a loving caress. She says, “If I were to forget everything else in the world, I could not forget her hand as it looked then. I could also make out that the sounds I had heard were her kissing my father’s ears and his mouth and his face. I looked at them for I don’t know how long” (31).

Annie, having fallen out of favor with her mother rushes home to seek her acceptance and is confronted with the primal scene. This moment changes things between Annie and her mother forever. As if she had walked in on her lover with another person, Annie vows that “all that was finished now” between her and her mother (32). Their paradisiacal hiatus is over, and things between the two women take a sour turn as Annie attempts to assert her own individuality and sexuality, which both prove completely different from those of her mother.

After Annie removes herself from her parents’ bedroom, instead of discussing the events that just transpired, Annie stands near her chair “half draped over the table, staring
at nothing in particular and trying to ignore my mother’s presence. Though I couldn’t remember our eyes having met, I was quite sure that she had seen me in the bedroom” (31). This dual voyeurism – Annie watching her mother but not leaving the room and Annie Sr. watching Annie but not asking her to leave the room – leads to a seminal confrontation between the two, as Annie Sr. asks,

> in a voice that was sort of cross and sort of something else, “Are you just going to stand there doing nothing all day?” The something else was new; I had never heard it in her voice before. I couldn’t say exactly what it was, but I know that it caused me to replay, “And what if I do?” and at the same time to stare at her directly in the eyes. It must have been a shock to her, the way I spoke. I had never talked back to her before. (31)

It is almost as if Annie Sr. has challenged Annie with her sexuality, a challenge which causes Annie to “talk back” to her mother in defiance. Annie’s mother turns away in defeat, knowing that Annie accepts her behavior as betrayal, as Annie vows that from now on everything between she and her mother will be different. Following the primal scene and the family meal Annie and her father go on their customary Sunday walk, saying, “My mother did not come with us. I don’t know what she stayed home to do. On our walk, my father tried to hold my hand, but I pulled myself away from him, doing it in such a way that he would think I felt too big for that now” (32). Perhaps Annie does not believe herself “too big” for these kinds of gestures at this point, but she is completely aware that a divide now separates herself from her parents.

It is immediately after this primal scene that Annie and Gwen fall in love. Annie realizes that her relationship with her mother will not go back to the way it was before she entered adolescence, thus she must find a “replacement” to attach her attentions to. Unlike Lucy and Xuela, Annie’s Oedipal replacement is a female. Despite her upbringing in a heterosexual home and her parents’ encouragement to marry a young man one day, Annie develops strong homosexual desire. Of her “own special happiness” with Gwen Annie says, “I would then laugh at her and kiss her on the neck, sending her into a fit of shivers, as if someone had exposed her to a cold draft when she had a fever” (50-51). Annie’s homosexual relationships begin her foray into a world of secrecy that is kept from her mother. H. Adlai Murdoch contends that Annie’s relationship with Gwen in
particular “Accomplishes two things – it replaces one female object of adoration, the mother, with another, Gwen herself; and it parallels in its growth Annie’s increasing hatred of and distance from her mother” (335). Like the two other heroines, as Annie’s sexual interest in other women grows her relationship with her mother deteriorates and the distance between them increases exponentially. After the first day at her new school Annie says of her mother, “I told her about my day, going out of my way to provide pleasing details, leaving out, of course, any mention at all of Gwen and my overpowering feelings for her” (33). At this point Annie is twelve, approximately the same age as Xuela and Lucy at the time of their sexual initiations.

Annie’s homosexual feelings are an interesting aspect of this text, though her sexual preference seems to have little to do with her upbringing and the Oedipal relationship she has with her mother, for Lucy and Xuela share these feelings concerning their mothers though they remain heterosexual. However, Annie’s interest in women is as voracious as Lucy and Xuela’s sexual desires for men, and her relationships do not result in children, like the other two women. Each heroine engages in sadomasochistic, unfruitful sexual relationships with a variety of people, a practice that begins at a relatively early age. The heroines’ respective behavior is the result of a lingering Oedipal fixation on her mother that never, as Freud suggests, tapers off or morphs into adoration for the father, and by extension men outside the family, which would in turn express itself as “normal” sexuality. Of course, normal sexuality as defined by Sigmund Freud is nowhere to be found in Kincaid’s texts. Instead, the heroines’ “abnormal” sexuality is part of their general resistance to patriarchal societal norms, and thus the gendered assumption that they will continue the cyclical lives of their mothers.

In the middle of adolescence Annie finds herself in an all-girls school, and becomes ensconced in a world in which young men simply do not exist. The girls in her class engage in all sorts of pseudo-sexual behavior; as hormones surge Annie finds her classmates pinching each other’s bottoms and “in each other’s laps, arms wrapped around necks” (37). As the girls grow a bit older and begin to mature physically, each change is shared among them, from sprouting breasts to the commencement of menstruation. Annie and her friends compare and explore each other’s bodies among the gravestones.
behind their school during their recess, making do with each other for lack of, and disinterest in, boys:

On hearing somewhere that if a boy rubbed your breasts they would quickly swell up, I passed along this news. Since in the world we occupied and hoped forever to occupy boys were banished, we had to make do with ourselves. What perfection we found in each other, sitting on these tombstones of long-dead people who had been the masters of our ancestors! (50)

In each of these three texts Kincaid clearly links knowledge and ownership of one’s sexual power with triumph over colonial oppression. At times, as within the passage above and Annie’s growing sexual knowledge, the oppressor to be triumphed over is in fact the Oedipal mother. Through these exploratory sexual behaviors the heroines are freeing themselves of the physical, sexual, and mental ties that fasten them to their mothers, thus binding them to their dark history as oppressed peoples.

While it is in her relationship with Gwen that Annie first begins exploring her sexuality on a more physical level, it is in her relationship with the Red Girl that Annie’s sadomasochistic urges surface. The Red Girl, who does not bathe or change her clothes frequently, represents the antithesis of everything Annie is expected to be. She never washes her hair or hands, “And on top of that, she had such an unbelievable, wonderful smell, as if she had never taken a bath in her whole life” (57). Unlike Annie, who as a young girl frequently took ritualistic baths with her mother, the Red Girl’s mother seems completely unconcerned with her hygiene and personal presentation. The Red Girl also represents a darker sexuality that is mired in faithlessness and secrecy. Annie meets the Red Girl behind the backs of both her mother and Gwen, knowing that both would feel hurt and would disapprove of such an unruly friend. Distinct from the tame and adoring romance between Annie and Gwen, the Red Girl introduces Annie to the pleasures of pain:

Then, still without saying a word, the Red Girl began to pinch me. She pinched hard, picking up pieces of my almost nonexistent flesh and twisting it around. At first, I vowed not to cry, but it went on for so long that tears I could not control streamed down my face. (63)
After Annie begins crying so hard her “chest began to heave,” “she stopped pinching and began to kiss me on the same spots where shortly before I had felt the pain of her pinch. Oh, the sensation was delicious – the combination of pinches and kisses” (63). It is at this point that Annie “stopped wondering why all the girls whom [she] had mistreated and abandoned followed [her] around with looks of love and adoration on their faces” (63).

In her piece “Jamaica Kincaid’s Voracious Bodies: Engendering a Carib(bean) Woman,” Kathryn E. Morris suggests the mother-daughter relationships within Kincaid’s works are rife with words symbolizing a romantic relationship between mother and daughter. Of Lucy she says,

The way in which she [Lucy] imagines the relationship between herself and her estranged mother is as a love affair. By deploying the discourse of romantic intimacy, Kincaid brings together the defamed history and myth of the Caribs with the discourse of sexuality. But placing this discourse between the figure of the mother and the daughter is troubling. It is a provocative image that calls to mind incest, domestic abuse, and an intractable filial bond(age). (962)

Morris’ assertion that Kincaid’s sexual discourse as located between mother and daughter is indeed troubling, and further proves that Kincaid’s heroines are Oedipally and sexually fixated on their mothers. Instead of locating the discourse of sexuality between daughter and father as it would occur in a classic Electra complex, Kincaid’s heroines remain sexually indifferent to and disinterested in their fathers, seeking sexual validation in their mothers. The female Oedipal complex has been turned on its head, and instead we see an example of a classic Oedipal complex from the perspective of an adolescent woman instead of a young boy. Upon discovering the lack of (sexual) interest the mother has for the heroine, each young woman attempts to find an Oedipal replacement. Interestingly enough, despite forays into experimental sexuality with multiple partners, the heroine is never able to truly “replace” the mother.

The sexual “bondage” Morris mentions between daughter and mother morphs from filial to extra-familial as each heroine subsequently begins to explore her own sexuality. Morris goes on to say that “Xuela’s sexuality in The Autobiography of My
Mother is narcissistic, powerful, and frightening” (963). It is clear Xuela’s sexuality is not about mutual pleasure or the physical expression of love, but rather the search for personal physical pleasure that is heightened by the presence of another. Her sexuality is powerfully frightening in the sense that it seems almost out of control. However, she is in complete control of her sexuality, though her expression of it is beyond the control of society. Despite the behavioral standards that dictate how a woman should control her sexuality, Xuela (as well as Lucy and Annie) subverts these standards that have been imposed upon her and acts upon her own free will. This ownership of her sexuality is one of the ways in which Xuela shakes off the oppressive control of the patriarchy, the cyclical life of mother/wife, and the gendered expectations and assumptions ascribed to her. Morris might deem Xuela’s sadomasochistic exploration as “frightening,” though that in itself – destructive sex that defies the quest for pregnancy – is another form of her sexual rebellion. Of her sometimes sadomasochistic relationship with Monsieur LaBatte Xuela says, “my nights were full of sighs, soft and loud with agony and pleasure. I would call out his name, Jack, sometimes like an epithet, sometimes like a prayer” (77). Xuela’s sexuality is so powerful that she has to be removed from various living situations because of her involvement with the male head of the household.

Xuela also becomes a threat to the other women in her life as competition in the most primal sense, rivalry for a mate. As discussed earlier, Xuela’s father’s new wife is so unhinged by Xuela’s flowering sexuality and changing body that she feels she must soon “guard” herself against the young Xuela once she becomes a “real” woman (58). After moving in with the LaBattes, Xuela reflects, “Long after my father removed me from his house and the presence of his wife, I came to understand that he knew it was necessary to do so” (62). Interestingly enough, this conversation between the two women takes place after Xuela has begun menstruating, suggesting that there is yet another rite of passage Xuela must engage in before she becomes a “real” woman. It is not until Xuela is sexually initiated that we get the sense she has become a “real” woman, reinforcing the idea that Kincaid is suggesting sexual power comes with ownership of one’s sexuality. During her first sexual encounter with Monsieur LaBatte Xuela says,

And the force of him inside me, inevitable as it was, again came as a shock, a long sharp line of pain that then washed over me with the
broadness of a wave, a long sharp line of pleasure: and to each piercing
that he made inside me, I made a cry that was the same cry, a cry of
sadness, for without making of it something it really was not I was not the
same person I had been before. (71)

Flowering sexuality combined with youth certainly causes anger and resentment
between mother and daughter within these texts as well. As Annie, Lucy, and Xuela
come of age their mothers and mother figures begin to acknowledge their own advanced
age. As Lucy is first exploring her sexuality with various men her mother figure Mariah
loses her husband to another woman. While Mariah is not outwardly resentful toward
Lucy, the contrast between youth/fruitfulness and age/bereavement is stark. We also see
this contrast in the relationship between Lise (Madame LaBatte) and Xuela; because Lise
has been literally “worn out” by Monsieur LaBatte’s voracious sexuality she wants to
present the young and burgeoning Xuela to him as a gift (64-65). Lise, as well as Xuela’s
husband’s first wife, all are discussed using metaphors for dried up seeds, earth, and a
distinct loss of vitality.

Annie Sr. certainly exhibits resentment for Annie’s youthful freshness when, upon
seeing Annie speak with a group of boys out in public, repeatedly berates her as a “slut,”
notably spoken in French patois, the language consistently reserved in Kincaid’s novels
as the language between women. When Annie returns from her outing in which she
canoodled with Mineu and his friends, she is confronted with her mother’s fiery anger:

She went on to say that, after all the years she had spent drumming into
me the proper way to conduct myself when speaking to young men, it had
pained her to see me behave in the manner of a slut (only she used the
French-patois work for it) in the street and that just to see me had caused
her to feel shame. (102)

Annie is berated so fiercely that she begins to feel she is drowning in the word “slut”
instead of water, leaving her gasping for a comeback: “As if to save myself, I turned to
her and said, ‘Well, like father like son, like mother like daughter’” (102). The fight
between Annie and her mother stops at this point and their “two black things” meet in
between them. Annie’s mother, threatened by her progress into adolescence and her
transformation into a sexual creature, tears her down, breaking her attempts to
differentiate herself from her mother. Interestingly, Annie uses this same tactic of similarity to point out her mother’s own flaws, highlighting Annie’s belief that her mother has parlayed her sexuality into her current life of disinterested comfort.

Lucy goes through a similar situation with her own mother. After her father dies she finally decides to write her mother a letter, albeit a “cold” one. She enumerates the way she feels betrayed by her mother and the many ways in which her mother has actually betrayed herself. Then she goes on to say,

I reminded her that my whole upbringing had been devoted to preventing me from becoming a slut; I then gave a brief description of my personal life, offering each detail as evidence that my upbringing had been a failure and that, in fact, life as a slut was quite enjoyable, thank you very much.

(127-128)

BARREN HEROINES

The heroines in Kincaid’s work continue to differ from the traditional Freudian explanation of female sexuality with their refusal to bear children. Each character goes to great lengths to prevent pregnancy and to terminate it when it occurs. Freud contends “normal” sexual development can only occur once penis envy has been replaced: “The feminine situation is only established, however, if the wish for a penis is replaced by one for a baby” (128). According to Freud, male children, “Under the impression of the danger of losing his penis, the Oedipus complex is abandoned, repressed, and, in the most normal cases, entirely destroyed, and a sever super-ego is set up as its heir” (129). I argue that Kincaid’s characters, rather than giving up a sort of penis envy in favor of bearing children, actually develop this super-ego themselves, further exhibiting their location within the traditional (with a twist) Freudian (male) Oedipal complex.

After Lucy’s unprotected sexual initiation with Hugh, she reflects back upon discovering her period for the first time. Her mother reassures her what she has found is normal, and tells her “that finding blood in my underpants might be something one day I would get down on my knees and pray for.” Lucy, who believes her mother never should have had children in the first place, determines she will do what she can to prevent herself from being locked into the same cycle of motherhood as her mother. After her experience with Hugh, she says,
I did not spend the next two weeks worrying about my period. If it did not show up, there was no question in my mind that I would force it to do so. I knew how to do this. Without telling me exactly how I might miss a menstrual cycle, my mother had shown me which herbs to boil, and what time of day to drink the potion they produced, to bring on a reluctant period. (70)

Though neither woman directly expresses why one might miss a period, all is understood under the guise of politeness. Pregnancy is not a desirable state for Kincaid’s heroines, and prevention and abortion of this state is one of the first steps these women take in order to distance themselves from the perpetual cycle of subservient motherhood as demonstrated by their own mothers.

The theme of willing oneself to menstruate, as well as the use of forest herbs and plants to rid oneself of pregnancy, are prominent in each of these three texts. Shortly after Xuela’s first sexual experiences with Monsieur LaBatte she becomes pregnant. At first she does not believe Lise when she provides the accurate diagnosis, noting, “then I believed her completely and instantly felt that if there was a child in me I could expel it through the sheer force of my will. I willed it out of me” (81). Her attempts to “will” the child out of her fail, and she eventually resorts to “Sange-Sange,” the medicine woman to help rid her of her pregnancy.

Xuela’s pregnancy is no doubt the result of her personal life with Monsieur LaBatte, but it also seems to spring from the silent wishes communicated to her from Lise, who never had a child of her own. When Xuela comes to live with the LaBatte’s she is no longer a child, but a young woman in the throes of adolescence. Still yearning for a child of her own, Lise telepathically asks Xuela to give her one. Xuela’s unwillingness to take on this role is obvious enough, though it is Lise’s silent requests that interest me. She, like Mariah and Annie Sr., each want something from one of the respective heroines that each young woman is unwilling to concede. However benevolent and generous these women may seem, it is their requests and assumptions that locate them as the colonizing forces in our heroines’ lives.
CHAPTER 3. COLONIZING FORCES

But what I see is the millions of people, of whom I am just one, made orphans: no motherland, no fatherland, no gods, no mounds of earth for holy ground, no excess of love which might lead to the things that an excess of love sometimes brings, and worst and most painful of all, no tongue. (For isn’t it odd that the only language I have in which to speak of this crime is the language of the criminal who committed the crime?)

(A Small Place 31)

One of the issues that make Jamaica Kincaid’s texts so complex lies in her ability to interweave West Indian history, tradition, subjugation, and repression into each character. Her works are complicated by a history that is ever present and her characters cannot easily escape the social and cultural limitations of their homes. As a postcolonial author, Kincaid’s works are steeped in the ramifications that political and social subjugation has had on the British West Indies, though the insidious figures of colonization are frequently displaced into seemingly benevolent characters.

Many of the peripheral women in these heroines’ lives serve as the personifications of the colonizing forces operating within Kincaid’s coming-of-age texts. These women, in subtle and sometimes not so subtle ways, work to uphold the patriarchal social standards that have been put in place by the ruling class of colonial forces. Jamaica Kincaid writes her texts into a postcolonial era in which Antigua and Dominica, the spaces in which her texts are based, have just shed the chains of imperialism. Working to restore themselves after the damages slavery, colonialism, and foreign rule have imposed upon them proves difficult, for as Kincaid frequently points out, the people of the West Indies are left without an identity of their own. It is precisely the location of our heroine’s physical homelands that help shape these texts and contributes to the specific social and familial issues each character deals with. In Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the subject, Carole Boyce Davies notes that,

One’s location may therefore be a site of creativity and re-memory; exploration, challenge, instability. Or it may be a site of further repression. But positionality assumes not necessarily fixity, but movement: “there is no fixed subject except by repression.” (154)
Annie, Lucy, and Xuela are not physically limited to their locations, as we see with their eventual migrations from home, but their locations color their experiences and the ways in which they view the world around them. The oppressive beings of the mother figures in Kincaid’s texts do attempt to limit the heroine’s physical locations however, telling their daughters in refrains that their homes will always exist in the West Indies, or where their mothers are located.

Coming from a tradition of postcolonial writers in which history is relived in her characters’ present, Kincaid focuses on the effects a dark colonial past has on contemporary West Indian women and their families. The links between past and present are highlighted in Kincaid’s A Small Place, written about her native Antigua: “To the people in a small place, the division of Time into the Past, the Present, and the Future does not exist. An event that occurred one hundred years ago might be vivid to them as if it were happening at this very moment” (54). If her texts are to be taken as true representations of women growing up in the West Indies, we can assume that much of the developmental differences in Kincaid’s adolescent characters are the result of a colonial heritage in which black families were routinely fragmented, pulled apart initially by slavery. Kincaid’s books are chock full of illegitimate children who are fathered by men who have never learned their names. A common thread in each of these three texts, Xuela’s employer Monsieur LaBatte’s exemplifies this loose sexual behavior: “He would not marry any woman. They would bear him children, and if the children were boys, these boys were given his full name, but he never married the mothers” (65). Indeed, Xuela’s credibility as a legitimate child of her father is often questioned by some of the more antagonistic characters within The Autobiography of My Mother; she says, “My father’s wife had always said to me, in private, when my father was not there, that I could not be his child because I did not look like him, and it was true that I did not have any of his physical characteristics” (52). Furthermore, the new school her father enrolls her in is open to legitimately born children only.

As a grown woman, to fare well in these stringent social conditions one must be married, although as we noted earlier this is not a desirable state for Kincaid’s heroines, as it is a state that comes with its own set of problems. Marriage, as demonstrated by the relationships of Lucy’s mother, Annie Sr., and Mariah, does not protect these women
against old age and infirmity, infidelity, and of course the wicked spells conjured against
the given man’s current wife and legitimate children. Marriage in the West Indies, as
depicted in Kincaid’s texts, does not protect women from the repercussions of their
husbands’ indiscriminat behavior.

As detailed in Kincaid’s novels, West Indian men have a sexual and social
freedom not allotted to the women of the Islands. The incidents between Annie and her
mother and Lucy and her mother concerning their perceived loose sexual behavior
indicates the strict manner in which women must conduct themselves in order to maintain
the respect of others. The double standard is felt as a powerful form of patriarchal
oppression in which women’s sexuality is tightly controlled. However, it is this sort of
sexual restriction that Kincaid’s heroines work against in the quest for their
own autonomy. This sexual independence represents a means for personal independence for
the heroines in Kincaid’s novels that also serves as a metaphor for the West Indies’
political and social independence.

Kathryn E. Morris focuses on the ramifications the colonial and patriarchal
themes running through Kincaid’s novels have on her wife/mother characters. She notes
that the mother figures in Kincaid’s texts are usually located in or “subsumed by” the
patriarchy, and that they represent traditional values and life roles to the heroines. Morris
also points out that according to Robert J.C. Young in Colonial Desire, colonial mother
figures are often subject to “double colonization,” or “in the first instance in the domestic
sphere, the patriarchy of men, and then, in the public sphere, the patriarchy of colonial
power” (955). Morris goes on to point out that it is precisely this “double colonization”
that prevents women from gaining their own autonomous voice and forging their own
destinies, as they are confronted in private and in public with silencing and oppressive
patriarchy. Kincaid’s characters in turn are shedding and resisting each part of this
double colonization by refusing to lock themselves into the submissive role of
(post)colonial wife/mother, and by physically removing themselves from the sites of the
dark histories that helped shape their postcolonial reality.

Annie, Lucy, and Xuela defy entrapment in the cycles that formed their mother’s
lives by exploring their sexuality in relation to themselves, as opposed to a vessel for the
pleasures of another. Their interests lie not in pleasing others or conforming to perceived
societal standards of sexual behavior; rather, they seek to gain control of their sexuality – thus their own bodies – and ownership of their own personal power. Annie, Lucy, and Xuela all reflect on the “comfort” they find in their own bodies: in the scents they produce, the reflection of their faces, and the sounds of their voices all represent calming, restorative, and autonomous power. Morris goes on to explain that in her revelry in herself and her sexuality,

Xuela is claiming her own body as a site for fetishization. She claims her sexual desire and unlike William Birge, for example, she does not seek to displace or ‘other’ her desire. She renounces the power of the phallus as the organizing principal of fetishism and sets herself apart from the patriarchal social order. (964)

I agree with Morris that Xuela (as well as the other two women) renounces the power of the phallus as the site of sexual fetishism. Each woman understands her own part in seeking personal pleasure; for them, men represent an additional aspect of physical pleasure, though not the sole source for it. Xuela and Lucy both note that the pleasure incurred by a man has nothing to do with the man himself, as a person or lover, but by the feelings he may be able to produce – the identity of the man is unnecessary, as the pleasure given by a man is universal among them.

The dominant patriarchal order is clearly represented in Kincaid’s work by her male characters in general, especially within Xuela’s father (The Autobiography of My Mother), Mariah’s husband Lewis (Lucy), and Mr. John (Annie John). These men are the “yes men” within their respective societies – men who have absorbed, either from privileged birth or in the quest for wealth and power, the values and sentiments of the dominant, colonizing class. bell hooks might classify such men as people who “passively absorb white supremacist thinking, and therefore never notice or look at black people on the streets or at their jobs, who render us invisible with their gaze” (2480). Though Mr. John and Xuela’s father are black, they both identify more closely with the ruling class and scorn the weak and impoverished black lower classes. Kincaid’s texts are set deep within the framework of postcoloniality, her characters struggling to reconcile newfound political freedom with the horrors their people and countries have previously witnessed at the hands of foreign rulers. The “dark deeds” that shaped the locations in which Kincaid
sets her texts have left Antigua and Dominica with stagnant and failing economies, and (according to Kincaid’s characters) left their people with extreme feelings of self-loathing and lingering aspirations to emulate the white, British ruling class.

Surely the ramifications of colonialization have affected the psychology of the Dominican and Antiguan people within Kincaid’s texts, particularly Annie, Lucy, and Xuela. Each girl receives her primary education from a British school in which she is taught to respect the British monarchy, British literature and styles of dress and living, and British ways of doing things in general. In *A Small Place* Kincaid notes, “So that was England to us – Queen Victoria and the glorious day of her coming into the world, a beautiful place, a blessed place, a living and blessed thing, not the ugly, piggish individuals we met” (31). The lessons learned of Britain and its people contrast starkly with most of the British people Kincaid’s native West Indians encounter in their homelands. Indeed the characters of British descent are often portrayed in an unfavorable light, as Annie’s headmistress, Miss Moore, is. Annie notes that upon viewing Miss Moore she knew right away the headmistress was from England, because she “looked like a prune left out of its jar a long time” (36). Miss Moore rules her school with an iron fist, hoping to “civilize” the young Antiguan girls. Annie also likens her to an owl, remembering how she stood in the classroom, “listening to some of the other activities, her gray eyes going all around the room hoping to see something wrong” (36). Annie goes on to wonder if Miss Moore even “smells like a fish,” for her mother had once told her that the only thing she didn’t like about English people is that they do not wash properly or frequently enough (36). Similar unfavorable characteristics are even applied to Xuela’s husband, a white doctor from England. His skin is described as transparent, “as if it were on its way to being skin but had not yet reached the state that real skin is” (152). As noted earlier in Chapter 1, Xuela decides he does not look like a man she should love. In other words, he resembles the ruling class rather than resembling the other people she has previously associated with love, namely herself.

In school rather than learning the true histories of their own countries and native peoples, the West Indian children in Kincaid’s texts are taught the glory of British history. History of the West Indies is taught, though as we see in *Annie John*, it is taught from a British perspective that colors the colonizers in magnanimous tones. Once, after
Mariah suggests she and Lucy visit a secret field of daffodils in the early spring, Lucy reflects on her days as a student at Queen Victoria Girls’ School:

I had been made to memorize it [a poem], verse after verse, and then had recited the whole poem to an auditorium full of parents, teachers, and my fellow pupils. I was at the height of my two-facedness: that is, outside I seemed one way, inside I was another; outside false, inside true. And so I made pleasant little noises that showed by modesty and appreciation, but inside I was making a vow to erase from my mind, line by line, every word of that poem. (18)

The poem, a British work concerning daffodils, represents the insidious ways Lucy and her peers had imbibed the patriarchal propaganda that is still associated with Antigua’s colonial past. Rather than gaining an education in her own nation’s history and art, Lucy is mis-educated as a British subject.

Annie’s schooling is also an excellent representation of the colonial forces at work in Kincaid’s texts. Annie and her classmates, who also attend a British run and founded girls’ school, are repeatedly scolded as wild and uncouth. Though the British, under the guise of patriarchal benevolence, have attempted to “civilize” these young, black, native Antiguan girls, Annie’s teacher exclaims that all of her efforts have been in vain. After Annie defaces one of her schoolbooks by writing beneath the picture of Christopher Columbus in chains “The Great Man Can No Longer Just Get Up and Go,” her teacher Miss Edwards goes berserk (78). Before she is sent to the headmistress Annie relays Miss Edwards’ livid scolding; she had “gone too far this time, defaming one of the great men in history, Christopher Columbus, discoverer of the island that was my home” (82). However does not even hang her head in remorse, instead standing tall, increasing her teacher’s anger as she berates her arrogance and “blasphemy.” Annie, by not even hanging her head in apology, reminds us of her quest for reclamation of her colonized past and her attempts to distance herself from her postcolonial present.
COLONIZATION AND THE PHALLIC MOTHER

Though many aspects of British patriarchy are reinforced by the male characters in Kincaid’s texts, as demonstrated by Miss Edwards, men are not the sole personifications of the colonizing forces at work in Kincaid’s texts. Rather, many of the most treacherous and insidious forces lie within her principal female characters, particularly Annie Sr., Mariah, and Lise. Many critics argue that the biological mother in each of these three texts operates as the colonizing force that each young woman, Annie, Lucy, and Xuela, must break free of, though I contend that all of the mother figures in Kincaid’s texts serve the same purpose. Rather than perpetuating the life cycles of the West Indian women that preceded Kincaid’s heroines, each young woman works to differentiate herself from her colonial past, and by extension, her biological mother.

H. Adlai Murdoch contends Annie’s mother, for example, operates within the family as a phallic mother, thus playing the role as the patriarchal force in Annie’s domestic sphere. She serves as, at least from Annie’s point of view, the head of the household, as well as the person whom she measures herself against in all situations. Annie, up until the point of puberty and her subsequent falling out with her mother, works to please Annie Sr. constantly. Her love for her mother is boundless, and her approval seems to be the only thing that Annie really strives for. However, it is clear that Annie Sr., as well as Lucy’s mother, has worked throughout Annie’s young life to refashion her as a new version of herself. According to Murdoch, Annie’s true breakout moment occurs when she asks her father to build her a new trunk. That way, like her mother before her, she will be able to leave her family in search of a new life, a life far from the perpetual ties that bind her to her colonial Antiguan past and the shackles of her mother. Murdoch contends that, “Such repetition [with the trunks] is necessary for the wheel to come full circle, for Annie to establish her own separation from the non-differentiated structure which she previously had been a part of” (339). Like her mother, Annie will pack her trunk and set off in search of a new life far removed from her family and her home.

Instead of encouraging Annie to find herself and develop her own individuality, Annie Sr. relished the similarities between she and her daughter. Annie and Lucy are both called “Little Miss” as young girls, for they so much resemble their mothers in
manner. Much like what Lucy experienced as a young woman, Annie’s mother never asked her what she wished to be as an adult; she simply made plans for Annie to travel to England to become a nurse – the same aspirations Lucy’s mother had for her daughter. The thought that these two young women might like to do something else with their lives never occurs to either mother, and when it is eventually expressed that the daughter does not want to fulfill her mother’s wishes or to grow up into an exact replica of her mother, the shock and hurt on behalf of the mother is palpable. It is clear at this point that in order for the heroine to break free of and differentiate herself from her mother she must suppress or change a part of her self. While she might understand herself to be a facsimile of her mother, this is a state she does not desire. Thus each heroine in these three texts works to separate herself from her mother and the life she represents.

Again it is important at this point to note the extremely large role mothers take in shaping the lives of their daughters in these texts, relegating the father into a nonentity in terms of his daughter’s future. H. Adlai Murdoch contends that until Annie develops Oedipal feelings toward her father she perceives her mother as the parent with the phallus (or simply put, the one in charge). Murdoch says that because Annie Sr. fulfills the phallic role in her family life, Annie has “no chance to flower” (339). Her personality and individuality are subsumed by her mother, who attempts to mold Annie into a smaller version of herself. Murdoch notes Annie Sr. attempts to turn Annie “into a simple extension of herself,” leaving Annie with “no possibility of establishing a valid, functioning persona” (339). While I do not believe Annie (or Lucy or Xuela, for that matter) ever switches her Oedipal attachment from her mother to her father, it is clear Lucy and Annie’s biological mothers are actually phallic mothers who leave the husband/father characters almost powerless. Because none of these young women ever transfer their Oedipal attachments from their mothers to their fathers, the only way out for the heroine is to distance herself emotionally and physically from the oppressive presence of the mother. Despite the fact that some critics, like Murdoch, argue Annie will turn from her phallic mother in favor or her father, she buries and represses the loving feelings for her mother and focuses on hate and anger, never transferring the loving and affectionate feelings. Annie and Lucy each focus on creating differentiations between themselves and their mothers, a differentiation that is more pronounced if each
woman trains herself to hate her mother for attempting to breed her into a clone of herself. From this perspective, it seems clear that Annie Sr. and Lucy’s mother actually serve as the patriarchal, colonizing forces that Annie and Lucy must break free of.

It is interesting to note that both Annie and Lucy’s mothers operate in this manner because they believe that their way is the best way. As noted earlier in Chapter 1, Lucy knows her mother would never understand her desires to fashion for herself a new identity, because why would someone of her own flesh wish to be so different from her mother? This attitude is extremely patronizing, barring the way for either young woman to even begin to think about becoming a different kind of woman. Resistance to such a future is only met with the following sentiments Lucy recounts about her mother:

I could see now why, to the few feeble attempts I made to draw a line between us, her reply always was “You can run away, but you cannot escape the fact that I am your mother, my blood runs in you, I carried you for nine months inside me.” How else was I to take such a statement but as a sentence for life in a prison whose bars were stronger than any iron imaginable? (90-91)

One of the many ways in which Lucy tries to differentiate herself from her mother is naming. Naming also plays a particularly large role in Annie John, as Annie has been named after her mother, solidifying her position as a miniature version of her mother. When Lucy attempts to change her identity by requesting a new name for herself, her mother virtually explodes with anger: “The moment I said this, she turned a dark color, the color of boiling blood. She turned toward me, and she was no longer my mother – she was a ball of fury, large, like a god” (150). It is clear that even in these small, childish attempts to establish her own individuality, Lucy is met with complete contempt.

It is for these reasons that “home” does not operate as a place of comfort and solace for Kincaid’s heroines. Once Annie, Lucy, and Xuela have begun on the path toward becoming women, home becomes a place of discomfort and repression. The young women no longer feel they belong there (especially Xuela, who never feels she belongs anywhere in her young life), as if they are outsiders within their own families. Carole Boyce-Davies notes, “For women, home and/or village, as we have already discussed, are often sites of compulsory domesticity an enforcement of specific gendered
relations” (65). Each woman’s family expects her to conform to the societal standards ascribed to her gender and class regardless of what she may want for herself, creating a microcosm of patriarchal oppression that mirrors the greater oppression the West Indies have suffered at the hands of the British.

The biological mothers are not the only women in Kincaid’s novels who operate as patronizing forces. Mariah and Lise are two prime examples of surrogate mothers who, under the guise of benevolent benefactor, reinforce the patriarchal binds that Lucy and Xuela are trying to escape from by leaving their (mother)lands.

Mariah is Lucy’s employer, confidante, and patron, while Lise serves as a surrogate mother to Xuela. Though each of these women genuinely loves the corresponding heroine and claims to only want the best for her, each woman wants something from the young woman that she is unwilling to concede. Instead of attempting to turn Lucy into a miniature version herself (like Annie Sr.), Mariah wishes Lucy to become a part of her family. She wants Lucy to see her as a friend and a sort of pseudo-mother, though she also wants her to remain in her position as employed caretaker for her children indefinitely. Her position as “the girl,” though not unpleasant, renders Lucy unable to live alone and to carve an independent life for herself.

Life with Lewis and Mariah is easy and comfortable, though Lucy is not entirely free. In “Jamaica Kincaid’s Lucy: Cultural ‘Translation’ as a Case of Creative Exploration,” Edyta Oczkowicz maintains,

The first two chapters (“Poor Visitor” and “Mariah”) illustrate Lucy’s abrogation of her past, and they re-establish the tension inherent in the colonial dichotomy of colonizer-colonized. These two worlds are still functioning for Lucy in America. They allow the heroine to demystify her disabling position as the colonized and thus initiate her liberation from it.” (144-145)

Lucy still constantly compares Mariah to her mother, enumerating the qualities that make her better than her mother and altogether different from her. However, Lucy’s relationship with Mariah is extremely intricate and complex. Oczkowicz notes that the complexity of their relationship is a reflection of Lucy’s attempts to appropriate her own past by leaving home and shaping a new identity for herself, attempts which are “further
complicated by her struggle to cut herself off from her mother and everything she could love” (147). This is certainly true, as Mariah loves Lucy without reservation, just as her own mother did before their relationship changed and her mother began to express more negative feelings toward Lucy. Lucy, in cutting herself off from her mother, has also relinquished her power to love without reservation. Mariah wishes Lucy would return this unguarded love and does not quite understand the complexity of Lucy’s relationship with her own mother, as demonstrated by Mariah’s response once Lucy opens up to her about her mother. Mariah, thinking Lucy needs a lesson in feminism, speaks to her about “women in history, women in culture, women in everywhere” as a consolation (131). Mariah’s attempts at comfort do not help, for Lucy is at a loss for words: “But I couldn’t speak, so I couldn’t tell her that my mother was my mother and that society and history and culture and other women in general were something else altogether” (131-132).

Regardless of Mariah’s wishes for Lucy to open up and to see the world from a perspective that differs from her hardened, jaded postcolonial point of view, she refuses such love with abandonment, as she does with her boyfriend Paul. Lucy finds love complicates things in her life, particularly after she has worked so hard to distance herself from the person she has loved the most. After Lucy witnesses a snowstorm for the first time she weeps at the beauty of it:

That the world I was in could be soft, lovely, and nourishing was more than I could bear, and so I stood there and wept, for I didn’t want to love one more thing in my life, didn’t want one more thing that could make my heart break into a million little pieces at my feet. (23)

For Mariah such a storm is “typical,” but to Lucy Mariah is someone who can “be made miserable [or happy] because the weather changed its mind”; she is someone who is used to softness and beauty, someone who does not find it difficult to open her heart to Lucy. Because this free giving of love is so uncomplicated for Mariah, the issues Lucy has with their relationship confuse and hurt her.

It is also impossible for Lucy to engage in such a mutually loving relationship with Mariah simply because she is her employee. As discussed earlier in this thesis, noted by Xuela, one cannot be a master and a friend. Mariah, in her position as a white, wealthy woman, is a member of the ruling class. Lucy, who is young, poor, black, and
foreign is employed by Mariah’s family. Despite all of Mariah’s efforts to forge a friendship of equality, the relationship between the two women resides within the limitations of master/servant. Though their relationship is not as prominently treacherous as Lucy’s mother wanting to map out her life for her daughter, Mariah does wish for Lucy to see the world as she does, and it pains her when Lucy refuses to do so, or simply cannot. While the field of daffodils symbolizes beauty and happiness to Mariah, for Lucy they only uncover images of colonial pain and oppression, giving us a clear impression of the colonizer/colonized positions Lucy and Mariah occupy.

Although racial and geographic difference does play a part in complicating the connection between these two women, it seems social class and basic upbringing puts even more between Lucy and Mariah. Lucy, who has grown up in the postcolonial West Indies, is no stranger to social inequality. Mariah, on the other hand, seems to take the perfection of her life for granted – that is until her world is shattered by her husband’s infidelity. Upon discovering Lewis’ extramarital affairs, Lucy is completely unsurprised. Where she is from this type of male behavior is an everyday occurrence, conduct women must simply put up with, if not ignore altogether. Despite Mariah’s position as a generally sympathetic character, it is still crucial for Lucy to move out of her home and to create a life for herself free of a surrogate mother.

Xuela experiences a similar situation in her relationship with Lise. Xuela is sent to work for the LaBattes in exchange for food and board while she attends school in Roseau. Despite her position as an employee Madame LaBatte, or Lise, connects with Xuela immediately. The connection between these two women is so strong verbal communication is rendered obsolete. Lise and Xuela communicate telepathically:

As I was trying on the dress I could hear her thoughts: she was thinking of her youth, the person she used to be when she first wore the dress she had just given me, the things she had wanted, the things she had not received, the shallowness of her whole life. All this filled the air in the room we were in, the room in which was the bed she slept in with her husband. My own thoughts answered hers: You were foolish; you should not have let this happen to you. (68)
Lise shares many details of her life with Xuela, including her unfulfilled desire for a child. Without words Lise asks Xuela if she might make a “gift” out of her to present to her husband, unbeknownst to Xuela at the time for the purpose of begetting a child. Of this connection Xuela reflects, “To communicate so intimately with someone, to be spoken to silently by someone and yet understand more clearly that if she had shouted at the top of her voice, was something I did not experience with anyone ever again in my life” (69). Lise bathes Xuela similarly to how Annie’s mother bathed her as a child, causing Xuela to question if such acts represented love. Lise cares about Xuela’s well being, bringing her in from the servant quarters during a prolonged rainstorm when she believes she can “hear” Xuela suffering far away in the tiny outbuilding.

Though Lise is clearly a benevolent benefactor, her behavior toward Xuela is undeniably patriarchal. In the first place she requests that a thirteen-year old girl become the sexual plaything of her insatiable husband, an act that reverberates with Ellen Handler Spitz’s piece about Persephone and Demeter. After Persephone disappears into the underworld, Spitz says,

> It is possible as well to read this incident as revealing by displacement the depths of Demeter’s unacknowledged ambivalence toward Persephone – not only, on the oedipal level, her jealousy toward the girl as the (incestuously) preferred object of the father and her envy for her “flowering,” her burgeoning fertility, but also, on a deeper level, Demeter’s wish to appropriate for herself all the prerogatives of motherhood. (413)

Because, or perhaps despite, Lise clearly has no physical connection with her husband any more, Xuela’s “burgeoning fertility” is an attractive commodity to Lise, one she feels she might parlay into a child for herself. Giselle Liza Anatol confirms the patriarchal assumptions surrounding such a desire as demonstrated by Lise’s use of English rather than Creole. When Lise confirms Xuela’s pregnancy she speaks in English, or the “father tongue” instead of the Creole that the two women had previously used to communicate. To Anatol this change in language represents Lise’s “complicity with patriarchal dictates for the oppression of women” (946). Anatol is accurate in describing Lise as a colonizing/patriarchal force, a force which Xuela, like Lucy in her relationship with
Mariah, must separate herself from in order to gain individuality. Despite her own defeated state, Lise encourages Xuela to conform to her patriarchal desires and prematurely take on the role of mother. This of course is a request Xuela must refuse if she wishes to continue her quest for autonomy, and so she sneaks from the house in the dead of night to rid herself of the pregnancy and Lise’s expectations of her.

Lise’s attempts at commodifying Xuela’s sexuality also hearken back to Gayle Rubin’s “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex.” Rubin focuses on the various institutions that have worked to oppress women and the many ways women are trafficked between men as gifts. Rubin defines a “sex/gender system” as “the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied” (88). Lise has developed her own sex/gender system in which she presents Xuela to her husband, thus transforming Xuela’s own sexuality into an economic medium that will satisfy her husband’s sexual needs and (hopefully) fulfill her desire for a child.

Perhaps to Xuela’s own surprise, she accepts Lise’s request simply because she feels a physical relationship with Monsieur LaBatte is what she wants: “and so when he came closer to me and asked me to remove my clothes, I said, quite sure of myself, knowing what it was I wanted” (70). Instead of taking the passive role as a “gift,” Xuela takes ownership of her sexuality and makes the conscious decision to engage in a corporeal relationship with Lise’s husband. It is interesting to note, however, that when the notion of moving in with the LaBattes is first broached to Xuela by her father, she notes, “I did not object, I could not object, I did not want to object, I did not know then how to object openly” (63). This inability to object might cause one to determine that Xuela’s relationship with Monsieur LaBatte is grounded in a sexual transaction that lies outside of her hands, though one would be wrong to assume this for Xuela immediately objects to and rejects Lise’s requests for a child. It is at this point, when she terminates her pregnancy, that Xuela begins to openly object – at this point she becomes a new person: “I knew things I had not known before, I knew things that you can only know if you have been through what I had just been through. I had carried my life in my own hands” (83). Xuela carries her life in her hands in more ways than one at this juncture – she literally takes her life in her hands and undergoes a dangerous medical procedure, yet
she also becomes fully responsible for her own life and desires. Rather than succumbing to Lise’s wishes and taking the pregnancy to term, Xuela objects and makes her own decision about her future.

DISTANCING THE PAST

In “Exiled at Home: ‘Daughters of the Dust’ and the Many Post-Colonial Conditions,” Catherine Cueinella and Renee R. Curry discuss exile and migration and their many varieties:

Exile has a long history. Paul Tabori locates the earliest exile “in the flight of the Egyptian Sinuhe about 2000 BC.” Since that historic exile, the humanities has defined the term in many ways. “Exile” bears connotations ranging from chosen separation to coerced banishment. The overt pathos of exile is loss, sorrow, and nostalgia. Scholars remain divided about whether the pain of exile stems from the act of separation or from the longing for the actual lost geography. (198)

In terms of Kincaid’s characters, I contend the pain of exile her heroines feel is due to the actual act of separation. There seems to be little evidence of longing for the “lost geography” of their homelands, rather each woman focuses on the moment of separation between she and her homeland – and thus her mother. The characters in Kincaid’s texts choose exile or migration for themselves – it is not imposed upon them; rather, it is necessary they embark on these migrations in order to become autonomous individuals. It is migration that makes personal growth and identification possible for Kincaid’s heroines, allowing them to remove themselves from the boundaries of their pasts/histories and the significations of the geography of their homelands. Cueinella and Curry go on to note that “[b]anishment and withdrawal lead to adventure and discovery.’ In other words, exile creates story. If characters stay at home, no story occupies or frames them” (198). This is certainly true in the cases of Kincaid’s heroines, for without their subsequent migrations Annie, Lucy, and Xuela would be unable to create and write their own stories; rather they would relive the same stories as the women that preceded them. One is reminded at this point of Hélène Cixous’ call for woman to “write her self,” or to create her own identity rather than allowing members of the patriarchy to create/write it for her (2039). Kincaid, and Annie, Lucy, and Xuela through their narration, all heed
Cixous’ call, that women must “write themselves,” or bring themselves into being through writing. Cixous contends women have traditionally been barred from writing, having been “driven away as violently [from it] as from their bodies” (2039). Instead, women must create their own texts rather than allowing their lives to be written for them by male authors. Kincaid is indeed “talking back” and creating her own écriture féminine through the narratives of Annie, Lucy, and Xuela, in essence creating a text of her own life.

Jamaica Kincaid writes herself and the lives of other West Indian women, working semi-autobiographically, as she herself was born in the West Indies only to later immigrate to the U.S. This sort of autobiography is an exploration of the native West Indian young woman and her family, work that leads Carole Boyce-Davies to note, Issues of home and exile are addressed. Home is often portrayed as a place of alienation and displacement in autobiographical writing. The family is sometimes situated as a site of oppression for women. The mystified notions of home and family are removed from their romantic, idealized mooring, to speak of pain, movement, difficulty, learning and love in complex ways. Thus, the complicated notion of home mirrors the problematizing of community/nation/identity that one finds in Black women’s writing from a variety of communities. (21)

These themes are prominent in Kincaid’s three texts, reinforcing the notion that when it comes to her characters, we cannot easily separate home from history and family from tradition. Breaking free of one of these means leaving the others behind as well, for family, history, home, and nation are all bound together so tightly. Holding on to family, for example, necessitates connection with home and nation.

It is clear that Annie, Lucy, and Xuela cannot move on with their futures until they have separated themselves emotionally and physically from their pasts, and namely from the women who represent these pasts. Kathryn E. Morris points out that “The loss of the mother is [within The Autobiography of My Mother] an allegory for Dominica’s decolonization in which Xuela’s abandonment by her mother mirrors Dominica’s abandonment by the mother country” (955). It is also clear that to leave the (mother)land is to separate oneself from the patriarchal forces and colonial pasts that have shaped each
heroine’s life. Each woman embarks on a migration that removes her from the sites of her past and deposits her in new and unfamiliar landscapes. Annie and Lucy both travel over seas to land in foreign countries, while Xuela and her husband move to a new house in the mountains where neither of them knows anyone. Though Xuela’s move is not quite a migration, she still removes herself from the possibility of reliving her mother’s life: she is a “Carib woman who does not leave her place and who does not venture away or reproduce” (Morris 962, my emphasis). The heroines know if they are to remain in their birth place/homelands there is little chance that they will be unable to resist perpetuating the feminine circular history as a subjugated people. Migrations in Kincaid’s texts can be seen as a form of rebirth in which the heroine sheds her old life and determines for herself the parameters of her new life. Kathryn E. Morris says of Xuela’s quest for self-identity: “She attempts a birthing of herself, independent of the mother, in order to distance herself from her mother’s fate as a vanquished subject” (955). By displacing herself physically each woman is able to start from scratch to create a new identity for herself.

Lucy, in her attempts to extricate herself from the complexities of her past, determines her life has been divided in to the past and present, with a line separating the two. To her “your past is the person you no longer are, the situations you are no longer in” (137). Her past is rooted not only in her relationship with her family, but in the people of her island and the histories that shaped their present situations. Lucy knows her physical position on Antigua is the result of a foul deed – her Carib ancestors were virtually exterminated by the colonizing British, while her black ancestors came to the island as slaves. Every aspect of her life in the West Indies is loaded with history, both familial and social. Of her quest to distance herself from her homeland and her mother reaching out to her by letter, she says:

The object of my life now was to put as much distance between myself and the events mentioned in her letter as I could manage. For I felt that if I could put enough miles between me and the place from which that letter came, and if I could put enough events between me and the events mentioned in the letter, would I not be free to take everything just as it
came and not see hundreds of years in every gesture, every word spoken, every face? (31)

By putting physical distance between herself and her past, Lucy works to create a new identity apart from her past and the impositions ascribed to her by this past. Though Lucy’s love for her mother does not really dissipate – it is only covered in anger and hatred – she knows she cannot become an autonomous individual if she remains closely emotionally connected to her mother. Oczkowicz goes on to discuss the complexities of Lucy’s migration. She notes that Lucy does love her mother deep down, and even acts like her (almost becoming her) on a number of occasions, including the moments when she feeds Mariah’s children. However, Lucy has drawn a line separating her from her past, and her mother belongs to the other side: “Lucy harbors a lot of anger towards her, anger which, until it is explained and understood by her, makes her translate her love for her mother into hatred and actual physical and mental separation” (147). In fact, Lucy attempts mental/emotional separation before she embarks on an actual physical separation, working as hard as she can to differentiate herself from her mother while she still resides in the West Indies.

Kincaid illustrates the migrations of her heroines as a vehicle for change and self-realization, breaking what Louis F. Caton recognizes as the literary tradition of women who go on quests and receive only humbled comeuppance for leaving “their place.” He says,

Women characters, Kincaid seems to be suggesting, are not imprisoned by the traditional narrow depictions of something like the monomyth; they can re-inscribe and subvert them and, in the process, call into question the quest’s assumed authority in fixing the female as subservient to the male. (137)

Rather, Kincaid’s heroines shake off any ties that might bind them in a subservient position to members of the dominant, patriarchal order – be it their “phallic mothers” at home, their benevolent mother figures, or the various men in their lives who seek to contain and control them.
CONCLUSION

Though a lot of work has been done on Jamaica Kincaid’s texts, I believe writing from a fresh perspective will better illuminate and help decipher the complexities in her work. The challenges in Kincaid’s work lie in her keen ability to weave conflicting issues of family, tradition, colonization and slavery into each of her main characters, making it difficult to separate one issue from another, or even to separate a character from her location. However it is not the goal of this thesis to separate the issues a character contains, or to explore how Kincaid’s characters are able to feel conflicting feelings toward their family members at the same time. Rather I have examined the long-term Electra complexes each of Kincaid’s three heroines harbors for her mother in the hopes of better understanding the rest of her character’s development.

Kincaid’s work has been examined from a feminist, psychological perspective before, but this method is different in its inclusion of Sigmund Freud’s preverbal and pre-Oedipal stages. Instead of continuing to work under the assumption that Kincaid’s heroines are subconsciously trying to fulfill their Oedipal urges toward their fathers, I argue that Kincaid’s heroines are actually perpetually fixated on their mothers to the point of treating these connections like romantic relationships. Kincaid’s father figures are relegated to the peripheries of her texts while the mother figures take center stage as the site of adoration, love, desire, and later patriarchy and betrayal.

After a brief look at the various psychological conditions affecting Kincaid’s three heroines we are able to draw certain conclusions about these women. As young children they were, like all children (according to Freud) deeply attached to their mothers. While this attachment is generally supposed to last until about the fourth year of one’s life, Annie, Lucy, and Xuela never transfer this affection to their fathers, in what Freud would dictate as a step in the right direction toward “normal” female sexual development.

Instead Kincaid’s heroines transfer their Oedipal attachments to extra-familial lovers. This transferal takes place in the middle of adolescence for Annie, Lucy, and Xuela, and as interest in extra-familial relationships grows connections between heroine and family dissipate. Part of the reason for this familial disintegration is because as each woman matures physically she comes to realize she is not the center of her mother’s
universe. She determines she must compete with her father for the affections of her mother, and also comes to terms with her mother’s own perceived phallic role in the household. As young children these women, particularly Annie and Lucy, identify their mother as head of the household, only to discover once they begin to become women themselves that this only appears so. In fact the mother figure has betrayed the daughter in allowing her to think a.) that mother and daughter would never be separated and that no one would ever come between them, and b.) that they are all-powerful. It is not until adolescence that each young woman comes to terms with the subjugation of her own mother through marriage and motherhood and the expectations society applies to these roles.

Later on in the adolescent stage each young woman also begins to notice the patriarchal role her mother figure(s) play in her own life as a colonizing force. It is assumed that each woman will replicate the vanquished life of her mother as mother/wife, and all attempts are made on behalf of the mother figure to ensure each young woman is “properly” brought up. This generally means that she will adhere to the social and cultural standards ascribed to (post)colonial women in the West Indies, while no account is ever taken of the heroine’s expectations of and hopes for her own life.

It is about this time that Kincaid’s heroines become sexual beings, exploring their own sexuality outside the prescribed social realms of their upbringing. This exploration and later ownership of sexuality is an integral step in Kincaid’s characters’ quest for personal independence, as it blatantly works against gendered cultural restrictions. Sexual freedom becomes a metaphor for personal freedom. The sexual behavior of Kincaid’s heroines is particularly subversive because it is physically unfruitful and non-reproductive. Instead of bearing children and perpetuating the cycles that dictate the lives of their mothers and mother figures, each of these three heroines go to extreme efforts to prevent childbirth and motherhood, believing the state as one of the main “betrayals” each mother has committed against herself. Freedom and independence are necessary for Kincaid’s characters because so much of her work is commentary on the plight of women in the postcolonial West Indies. Thus I argue the mothers and mother figures within these three texts are the most ubiquitous colonizing forces working against Annie, Lucy, and Xuela.
Sexual freedom is only a step towards personal freedom for Kincaid’s heroines, however. They must also venture on a quest that separates them physically from their homes and families before they can gain personal agency. In an attempt to leave the past behind and move beyond their colonial heritage in search of identity, the heroine must sever ties with her family and set off in search of new destinations. It is only through this separation from the home/family that the heroine can experience a personal rebirth from which she can fashion her own identity.

Of course, the liberation of Kincaid’s heroines is bittersweet. They are finally able to explore the world on their own terms and to live their lives as they see fit. However it is clear that it is indeed impossible for each young woman to shed the yokes of family, home, and colonial patriarchy. True happiness, if found, is short lived, and in all three of these novels the end finds the heroine desperately alone. As Lucy sits home alone one night after ending her connections with virtually everyone in her life, she records in her new journal, “I wish I could love someone so much that I would die from it” (164). The cost of independence, it seems, is true love and happiness.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Education

MA in English, multicultural women’s literature
Focus in Publishing and Editing
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BA in English, focus in literature
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Work Experience

Instructor, June 2008 – Present, Tallahassee, FL
Teaching one 25-student section of ENC1101, the first component of Florida State’s First Year Writing Program. This is a CARE class, which focuses on students who represent the first in their families to attend college. It is a diverse class where students are taught process-based writing skills and the various ways they might apply these skills throughout life. It is also a “paperless” classroom, in which students post their weekly journals, paper drafts, and other assignments on the course website.

Instructor, January 2008 – April 2008, Tallahassee, FL
Taught two 18-student sections of ENC1102, the second requirement of Florida State University’s First Year Writing program
Focusing on research writing in a technology-based classroom; students work in a computer classroom in which they learn to edit their peers’ work on the computer, maneuver databases and other online resources, as well as create and work on their own web pages

Instructor, June 2007 – December 2007, Tallahassee, FL
Taught one 25-student section of First Year Composition (ENC1101), honing students’ creative and critical writing and reading skills

Server/Shift Manager, March 2003 – Present, Tallahassee, FL
Oversee restaurant operation at Gordo’s Cuban Café. Also delegate duties to other employees and manage daily financial transactions, in addition to assessing and serving customer needs

Additional Activities

Volunteer lacrosse coach for Lincoln High School, January 2006 – August 2006, Tallahassee, FL
Assisted Head Coach Amberly Wenrich teach beginning players basic lacrosse skills, lead drills, and run practices

Active member of Florida State Women’s Lacrosse Club from September 2002 – December 2005
Team co-captain for final two seasons

Studied abroad at Florida State University’s Study Center in London, UK, fall semester 2004
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