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Returning to the girl within: an exploration of the mother-daughter dyad in Jamaica Kincaid's Annie John

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Returning to the girl within:
An exploration of the mother-daughter dyad in Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*

by

Jennifer Marie Myskowski

A Thesis Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the
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Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa

1995

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For Marie, who encouraged me to begin the journey.

And for Scott, who helped me complete it.
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LEARNING TO READ ANNIE JOHN

A year ago I began this project armed with a deep desire to write about *Annie John* because it evoked in me rich memories about my own childhood and my relationship with my mother. I knew very little about Jamaica Kincaid or her West Indian culture, but I believed that my passion for her novel would sustain me through the volumes of history books and cultural studies I would need to read for this thesis. And I know now that passion does last for quite a long time, perhaps even for a whole year. But as I read through the pages I have all but completed and revised, I am struck by how very different this project is when compared to what I had originally intended to accomplish.

I have eliminated all of the anecdotal stories about my relationship with my own mother, when at one time they were to be the centerpiece of this thesis. So much of my preliminary research on the novel led me to believe, quite naively, that *Annie John* told a universal story of a young girl's maturation. At least I discovered numerous critics who concluded that there was no harm in reaching across cultures and claiming *Annie John* as a story for all women, about all women. Consequently, I had planned on presenting stories from my childhood and comparing them with scenes from the novel to point out places of intersection, ultimately hoping to make some broad, universal statement about the mother-daughter dyad.

Interestingly, many other women have accomplished this very same task, if not in a Master's thesis, then in the letters they have written to *Annie John*'s author. Because Kincaid became an established writer while working at *The New Yorker*, her most prominent fans, the ones who come to hear her read and
have their copies of *Annie John* autographed, are primarily white, middle-class American women, usually somewhere between the ages of twenty and thirty. While Kincaid has warmly acknowledged these fans, she is also uncomfortable with their attachment to her novel. In an interview with Selwyn Cudjoe, Kincaid said, "It's strange to get letters from white women saying, 'Oh, that sounds just like my relationship with my mother'" (221). Kincaid has also admonished the literary critics who continually emphasize her stories as being traditional and universal. A fierce individualist, she constantly points to the unique experiences her characters endure.

And today I believe Kincaid is correct in warning her readers that *Annie John*’s life is not like everyone else's. But I come to this conclusion only after writing my own autobiographical story and forcing a comparison between my childhood memories and *Annie John*’s. As I wrote my childhood stories and reflected on the stories Kincaid presents in *Annie John*, I discovered some similarities, but I also came to acknowledge the very large ocean that lies between our homelands and experiences. In wanting to believe that *Annie John* told the story of my maturation, I initially ignored details that pointed to the differences between my experiences and the young protagonist’s, and instead concentrated solely on how we were alike.

For instance, I often overlooked *Annie John*’s unique cultural background, because on the surface her life in Antigua does not appear to be too disparate from my own life and the majority of Americans who read her work. She seems to come from a middle-class family where there is enough food to eat, a relatively safe and secure home, and various other inexpensive luxuries that make life bearable and sometimes enjoyable. Furthermore, Annie was schooled
in institutions that were modeled after the British educational system, thus she was exposed to many of the same staunch traditions that British and American students continue to endure today: starched school uniforms, Sunday religious classes, and the works of John Milton.

But there are also numerous moments in the novel when Annie confirms that her experiences differ dramatically from her Western European readers. In chapter seven, "The Long Rain," Annie becomes debilitated by a mysterious illness that utterly saps her physical strength, her appetite, and her will to live. She is confined to her bed for weeks, only aware that it is raining outside and that people are continually visiting her to see if they can cure her illness. Only Annie's grandmother, Ma Chess, who appears out of nowhere, can help heal her granddaughter and restore her physical strength.

When first confronted with Annie's mysterious grandmother, I initially ignored Ma Chess's magical powers, believing these abilities were probably fantasized by Annie, or superstitions that she began to believe only because she was ill. The young girl was extremely delusional during her illness and experienced all manners of strange visions, imagining that she was growing larger and then smaller at one point in the novel, reminiscent, as Diane Simmons notes, of Alice's Adventures In Wonderland (114). When I have been ill, I have imagined similar outrageous events that seem irrational only in hindsight. Annie craved the attention of a maternal figure who could nurture her, so consequently I concluded that her grandmother served as a symbol of the power all maternal figures have to nurture others. Certainly, her grandmother could not really appear and disappear as she pleased, like the Cheshire Cat. Or could she?
Kincaid suggests that Annie's perceptions of her grandmother had nothing to do with Annie's poor health. In reference to the powers of obeah women like her grandmother, Kincaid says, "For a while, I lived in utter fear when I was little, of just not being sure that anything I saw was itself" (Cudjoe Interview 226). Kincaid concludes that the obeah woman's feats were very real, despite how fantastic they seemed. But without any knowledge of the impact that the obeah woman had on the lives of Antiguans, many of Kincaid's readers might dismiss the grandmother's powers and Annie's experiences as simple metaphor. Or perhaps conversely, one might conclude that Kincaid comes from a primitive society where the laws of science have not yet completely infiltrated the community, and so the native people create their own fictional stories to explain the unexplainable. Is it so impossible to believe that the obeah woman really maintains some powers? At one time, it was very difficult for me to accept the idea that Kincaid might be writing about the obeah woman literally and not metaphorically.

And in fact, most recently a handful of literary critics have begun to point out places where Kincaid's *Annie John* is often misinterpreted by both the general reader as well as the literary scholar. Laura Niesen de Abruna, Evelyn O' Callaghan, and Geta LeSeur have all introduced innovative cross-cultural approaches to the novel, emphasizing the impact Kincaid's nationality has had on her fiction and her perception of the world. And other scholars like Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tifflin have done much research on the historical context from which Caribbean authors write, detailing the unique circumstances these writers face as they negotiate their identity among a variety of cultures that have origins in Africa, Asia, and Europe, but all coalesce in the
Caribbean. These scholars all caution readers to consider the work of authors like Kincaid from a variety of perspectives, not just the individual's own context.

Thus, this study of *Annie John* no longer concentrates on the similarities between Annie's life and my own. Rather, this thesis analyzes Annie's unique position as a post-colonial figure, detailing the conflicts that she experiences as she tries to negotiate her life within a community dominated by conflicting cultural mores. In "Things Are Not Always What They Appear To Be: Looking For The Jablesses," I will briefly examine the critical reception of Jamaica Kincaid's fiction since the publication of her first book *At the Bottom of the River*. In particular, I will explore some of the problems literary scholars have faced when analyzing Kincaid's novels, most specifically, *Annie John*, as well as detail current approaches critics are employing in order to understand Kincaid and her work. In "Returning To The Girl Within," I will closely analyze the impact the colonial empire had on Annie's maturation and her relationship with her mother. While Kincaid rarely identifies the colonial empire by name in *Annie John*, she does offer readers numerous examples of how Western European influences have invaded and destroyed much of the island's indigenous culture. In "A Very Large Place: Jamaica Kincaid Comes To America," I will discuss the stylistic and subject changes that Kincaid initiated in the works she published after *Annie John*. I will also examine her most current projects, including recent articles that have appeared in *The New Yorker*, and her latest novel which will be released this Winter. What can we expect from Kincaid in the future? How has her fiction changed since the writing of *Annie John*? And most importantly, as critics, what can we do to prepare for her new works?
A year ago I concluded that young Annie might very well be me, as she battled with her mother over the physical and emotional changes that were impacting her life. While I still feel strongly about Kincaid’s Annie John, I no longer feel compelled to adopt Annie’s story as my own. Rather, today I can clearly identify the places where Annie and I share common experiences, but I also realize that our worlds are dramatically different as well. But I suspect until scholars begin to thoroughly address the unique features of Caribbean literature, readers like myself will continue to mistake Annie’s experiences as traditional and universal.

It has taken me a year to comprehend the difference between my personal history and Annie’s. And in hindsight, a year does not seem that long to learn how to read again. In fact, I am grateful for the opportunity.
THINGS ARE NOT ALWAYS WHAT THEY APPEAR TO BE:
LOOKING FOR THE JABLESSES

In chapter one of *Annie John*, Jamaica Kincaid's young protagonist describes the long baths that she and her mother shared in order to ward off the Jablesses: women with supernatural powers who change shapes and cast evil spells.

> It was a special bath in which the barks and flowers of many different trees, together with all sorts of oils, were boiled in the same large caldron. We would then sit in this bath in a darkened room with a strange smelling candle burning away. As we sat in this bath, my mother would bathe different parts of my body; then she would do the same to herself. (14)

After completing this ritual Annie was certain, that at least for a little while, the Jablesses could not hurt her. But she was still careful to watch the people and animals around her, because she had learned from her mother that things are not always what they appear to be.

Similarly, the critics and fans who have followed Kincaid's career since the publication of her first essay in *Ingenue* magazine have discovered that her fiction is not always what it appears to be either. At least, during the twenty-two years that she has been writing, Kincaid has managed to surprise scholars enough times to make some question their authority as literary critics. Diane Simmons has even wondered if Kincaid's magical language is the author's own spell, one that soothes and possibly even deceives the reader until she is trapped in Kincaid's mysterious world (42). But whether or not Kincaid consciously writes to deceive or trick her audience, a close analysis of the reception of her
books reveals that her writing has certainly posed unique challenges to scholars and general readers alike.

When American audiences were first introduced to Jamaica Kincaid's collection of stories, *At the Bottom of the River*, in 1983, they probably knew next to nothing about the author. While Kincaid had already been publishing essays and stories in *The New Yorker* since 1974, her works often appeared as though they were submitted anonymously. A deeply private individual, Kincaid was willing to share her stories with readers, but she did not like talking about herself outside of the work she published. That she was born in Antigua and had moved to the United States when she was seventeen was information that many readers had gleaned from her writing. But only her closest friends and colleagues knew that Kincaid had not seen her mother in twenty years, or that she had changed her name from Elaine Potter Richardson to Jamaica Kincaid. However, while Kincaid was unwilling to divulge information about her personal life in interviews, her writing was becoming increasingly intimate and autobiographical.

It is interesting then to note that when *At the Bottom of the River* was first released to the public, reviewers compared the collection to a diary: "too personal and too peculiar to translate into any sort of sensible communication" (Milton 22). Set on the island of Antigua, the ten stories in the collection examine the experiences of a young girl, particularly as she relates to her mother and the other children who inhabit her world. Beginning with the story "Girl," Kincaid clearly establishes an antagonistic relationship between the unnamed narrator and her mother. And each story that follows examines some aspect of
the mother-daughter relationship, highlighting both the joyous and depressing moments in the characters' lives.

While many reviewers praised Kincaid's intuitive understanding of human relations, as well as the magical quality of her rhythmic prose, they also found that her stories were seriously underdeveloped. In particular, Anne Tyler commented that

> these stories have all of poetry's virtues—care for language, joy in the sheer sound of words, and evocative power—they also have its failings. They are often almost insultingly obscure, and they fail to pull us forward with any semblance of plot. Not once in this collection do we wonder what happens next. Not once do we feel that the writer is leaning forward and taking our hands and telling us a story. Instead, she is spinning lovely, airy webs, with a sidelong glance in our direction every now and then to see if we are appreciative. For this reason, *At the Bottom of the River* in its final effect seems curiously cold and still. (33)

In addition, Edith Milton suggested that the stories were "a literary equivalent of rock video in which technical adroitness in manipulating an image and sensuous pleasure in what can be done with it rather preclude questions about why" (22). Indeed "My Mother," the ninth story in the collection, illustrates Kincaid's dependence on mysterious images to impart meaning to the reader:

> One day my mother packed my things in a grip and, taking me by the hand, walked me to the jetty, placed me on board a boat, in care of the captain. My mother, while caressing my chin and cheeks, said some word of comfort to me because we had never been apart
before. She kissed me on the forehead and turned and walked away. I cried so much my chest heaved up and down, my whole body shook at the sight of her back turned toward me, as if I had never seen her back turned toward me before. I started to make plans to get off the boat, but when I saw that the boat was encased in a large green bottle, as if it were about to decorate a mantelpiece, I fell asleep, until I reached my destination, the new island. When the boat stopped, I got off and I saw a woman with feet exactly like mine, especially around the arch of the instep. Even though the face was completely different from what I was used to, I recognized this woman as my mother. We greeted each other at first with great caution and politeness, but as we walked along, our steps became one, and as we talked, our voices became one voice, and we were in complete union in every other way. What peace came over me then, for I could not see where she left off and I began, or where I left off and she began. (59-60)

After reading passages like this one, reviewers suggested that Kincaid's stories were too cryptic to understand. Does the protagonist really leave her mother? Is she dreaming? What does the boat encased in green glass symbolize? The stories were certainly quirky and strange, but this, said reviewers, was not enough to make them worth reading again and again.

While five writers reviewed *At the Bottom of the River* when it was initially published, very few critical studies of Kincaid's stories were produced
even two years after the collection's release. It seemed that few scholars knew how to approach the stories, or else they were uninterested in them. Only "Girl," the story in which Kincaid claims she discovered her voice, enjoyed praise, but it had first been published in 1978 in *The New Yorker* and so reviewers and critics alike were already well acquainted with it. And while Tyler and Milton believed *At the Bottom of the River* presented an interesting psychological model of a young girl, they ultimately concluded that the obscurity of the stories would hinder any in-depth analysis of the book.

Kincaid was eventually awarded the Morton Dauwen Zabel Award of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters for *At the Bottom of the River*, but some critics scoffed that she had received it only because she was the daughter-in-law of *The New Yorker*'s editor, William Shawn, and not because she deserved it. But Kincaid was not daunted by the negative criticism that *At the Bottom of the River* received, nor did she rest easy with her literary award. Rather, Kincaid seemed to heed the concerns of her reviewers, so that when *Annie John* was published in 1985, many of the problems present in the first book were eliminated in the second.

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1 In addition to Anne Tyler and Edith Milton's reviews, three others were released during the year *At the Bottom of the River* was published. Susanne Freeman, Gregory Maguire, and Janet Wieche all, as Bryant Magnum notes, did not find Kincaid's stories particularly praiseworthy (263). Instead, Magnum correctly concludes that only Derek Walcott found the novel completely worthy of praise, but his feelings were expressed only in a letter to *At the Bottom of the River*'s publisher, and not in a printed review (263).
In fact, when *Annie John* was released it received instant praise. No longer were readers complaining about obscure plots or mysterious characters, but instead reviewers suggested that the novel was surprisingly simplistic and accessible. In her essay "Mothers and Daughters: Jamaica Kincaid's Pre-Oedipal Narrative," Roni Natov concluded that the novel deserved the attention of adolescents as well as adults (1). What had changed about Kincaid's writing to make readers so receptive to the later book? On a technical level, Kincaid's language was still characteristic of the style she employed in *At the Bottom of the River*, rhythmic and repetitive. But in *Annie John* she had eliminated almost all dream sequences and many of the mythical figures that had appeared throughout her early stories. It was as if Kincaid rewrote the stories in *At the Bottom of the River* and made them more simplistic in *Annie John*.

*Annie John* sold thousands of copies in the first two years and became Kincaid's most well-known work. The novel was a finalist for the Ritz Paris Hemingway Award, and was named one of the best books of 1985 by the *Library Journal* and *The New York Times*. But more importantly, a large section of the American public, who had never before read Kincaid's work, was finally discovering her. Even today, *Annie John* is Kincaid's most popular and widely-read novel. And after *Annie John*'s release, *At the Bottom of the River* also gained some new admirers, who treated the book with much more tolerance than the original reviewers had. In particular, the short stories "Girl" and "Wingless" have since been frequently anthologized.

Similar to *At the Bottom of the River*, *Annie John* contains intimate details about the physical and emotional changes a young girl experiences as she matures and separates from her mother. Told from the first-person perspective
of young Annie, the novel is free of moralizing and preaching, and instead
draws strength from the narrator's detailed observations as she describes her
ever-changing relations with her mother. The text moves from episodes where
mother and daughter are deeply infatuated with each other, spending all their
time together, to moments when Annie has learned to hide books and marbles
from her mother, and makes wishes that her mother would die.

As a result of the subjects Annie John explores, it has often been critiqued
by feminist critics who embrace Kincaid's portrayal of the mother-daughter dyad.
In particular, if one reviews the essays written about Annie John within the first
year of its publication, it is obvious that most critics analyzed the novel
employing a feminist psychoanalytical approach. In fact, even today a significant
number of critical essays written about Annie John rely on Nancy Chodorow's
theory that the pre-Oedipal stage is critical in understanding the development of
females, and especially helpful in examining a woman's conflicted relationship
with her mother.

Chodorow, who sustains a prominent position among Western feminists
as a result of her work, The Reproduction of Mothering, became a powerful force
in the late 1970's when she began to publish articles questioning Freud's theories
of psychology because they focused almost exclusively on the male psyche and
considered females only as an afterthought. Chodorow believes that Freud
dedicated himself to proving the "primacy of the feminine and masculine
Oedipus complexes," as well as their "symmetry," ignoring the significance of the
pre-Oedipal, or pre-verbal stage, particularly as it impacts women (Chodorow 94).
According to Chodorow, there are several pre-verbal stages an infant passes through on its way to comprehending and acknowledging his or her personhood. For example, says Chodorow, when an infant is born, the child does not differentiate itself cognitively from its environment. It does not differentiate between subject/self and object/other. The infant experiences itself as merged or continuous with the world generally, and with its mother or caretakers in particular. (61) This merging of mother and child is a necessary step in the infant's progression toward realizing the significance of its caretaker as compared to the rest of the individuals in the world (Chodorow 63).

However, Chodorow says that somewhere between a child's fourth and sixth month he or she begins to become cognizant of some emotions:

- From a state of undifferentiation—between the "I" and the "not-I," and between the inside and the outside—the infant first begins to differentiate the quality of experience ("pleasurable and good" from "painful and bad"). From this develops a "dim awareness" of the object helping to produce this experience. [And] after this, the infant reaches a "symbiotic" stage of "mother-child" dual unity. (Chodorow 61)

At this point the mother acts as an "external ego" for the child, and in turn the infant still remains almost completely dependent on the mother's existence (Chodorow 63).

Eventually though, contemporary psychoanalysts tells us that the child will come to comprehend that the mother is a completely separate entity. As the mother or primary caretaker leaves the child alone for longer periods of time,
and as the infant naturally matures from a physiological perspective, "it begins to
distinguish aspects of maternal care and interaction with its mother, and to be
'able to wait for and confidently expect satisfaction'' (Chodorow 67). It also
realizes the differences between its own body and the objects in its surrounding
world. Ultimately, the infant will develop a knowledge of self from its
"relational experiences" both with the mother and the objects in its world
(Chodorow 61-70). The next stage the child will pass into is the Oedipal stage,
where he or she will become attracted to the parent or caretaker of the opposite
sex, realizing the contrasts between genders as well.

Chodorow, however, finds that the pre-Oedipal stage is much more critical
to women than is the Oedipal stage. She argues with Freud that women's pre­
Oedipal stage has a more dramatic impact on their lives than it has on men.
While Chodorow believes that both males and females participate in the pre­
Oedipal stage, girls remain attached to their mother's for a longer period because
of the different ways in which women take care of male verses female children.
For girls, their relationship with their mother is primary, and their relationship
with the father is only a secondary phenomenon (95).

A girl's prolonged attachment to her mother, says Chodorow, is a direct
result of one female who is both a mother and daughter, raising another female,
also a daughter. She says,

Because of their mothering by women, girls come to experience
themselves as less separate than boys, as having more permeable
ego boundaries. Girls come to define themselves more in relation
to others. Their internalized object-relational structure becomes
more complex, with more ongoing issues. (93)
Thus, girls need more time in relations with their mothers to sort through the complexity of their ego boundaries. But mothers also seem to perpetuate their daughter's attachment by encouraging a closeness that is almost "narcissistic" (Chodorow 93). Mothers are much more likely to identify on a physical level with their female children, and thus "perpetuate a mutual relationship with their daughters of both primary identification and infantile dependence" (Simmons 48). Thus, while all children pass through a pre-Oedipal stage where they cannot differentiate between themselves and their mothers, girls remain in this stage longer than boys because their mothers encourage them to do so.

Chodorow finds that it is not uncommon for girls to still be in some pre-Oedipal stage at the age of five, and even beyond. In fact, she concludes that even when a girl begins to show interest in her father, she does not lose interest in her close relationship with her mother. Rather, a girl may be passionately attached to both father and mother at the same time (126-127). But when a girl does enter the stage of sexual attraction to the father, much ambivalence between mother and daughter can result:

The turn to the father...is embedded in a girl's external relationship to her mother and in her relation to her mother as an internal object. It expresses hostility to her mother; it results from an attempt to win her mother's love; it is a reaction to powerlessness vis-a-vis maternal omnipotence and to primary identification. Every step of the way, as the analysts describe it, a girl develops her relationship to her father while looking back at her mother—to see if her mother is envious, to make sure she is in fact separate, to see if she can in this way win her mother, to see if she is really
independent. Her turn to her father is both an attack on her mother and expression of love for her. (Chodorow 127)

Chodorow indicates that a mother and daughter may never completely separate from each other and in turn may spend a lifetime trying to comprehend their relationship, as well as establishing their individual identities.

Chodorow's theories seemed particularly relevant to Annie John at the time that the novel was released because the protagonist appears to come from a middle-class home where the mother tends to domestic needs and child-care, and the father works outside of the household and is not very involved in family life. Thus, critics have most often used Chodorow's theories to prove that the novel is primarily concerned with showing the stages of psychic development that Annie passes through as she becomes physically mature.

Identifying the episodes in the text that reveal Annie's prolonged attachment to her mother, as well as the moments when the two females begin to show their ambivalence for each other has been the primary goal for most reviewers. For instance, in "Mothers and Daughters: Jamaica Kincaid's Pre-Oedipal Narrative," Roni Natov concluded that in the first chapter of the book Annie "experiences no boundaries between her body and her mother's. They are like animals, instinctually and mutually responsive, and from Annie's perspective, self-enclosed" (5). Natov pointed to the following scene in Annie John as evidence of her opinion:

As she told me the stories, I sometimes sat at her side, leaning against her, or I would crouch on my knees behind her back and lean over her shoulder. As I did this, I would occasionally sniff at her neck, or behind her ears, or at her hair. She smelled sometimes
of lemons, sometimes of sage, sometimes of roses, sometimes of bay leaf. At times I would no longer hear what it was she was saying; I just liked to look at her mouth as it opened and closed over words, or as she laughed. (Annie John 22)

For Natov this scene clearly identifies a young girl who is still deeply engaged in a pre-Oedipal world where the mother is the source of all happiness, and the father is conspicuously absent (5).

Diane Simmons employs Chodorow's theories as well to point to the mother's "narcissistic rage" upon realizing that her daughter "is developing a separate identity" (25).

One day, my mother and I had gone to get some material for new dresses to celebrate her birthday, (the usual gift from my father), when I came upon a piece of cloth—a yellow background, with figures of men dressed in a long-ago fashion, seated at pianos that they were playing, and all around them musical notes flying off into the air. I immediately said how much I loved this piece of cloth and how nice I thought it would look on us both, but my mother replied, "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." To say that I felt the earth swept away from under me would not be going too far. (Annie John 26)

For Simmons, Annie's mother's abrupt attempt to separate herself from her daughter shocks the young protagonist and leaves her feeling isolated. But, says Simmons, Annie's mother is beginning to realize that her daughter is not an
exact replica of herself, and she somehow feels that her daughter has rejected her, and so she is in turn rejecting Annie (25-26).

For the most part, all of the initial critiques of *Annie John* analyzed the novel in the same fashion as Natov and Simmons, pointing to places where the mother and daughter merge and separate according to Chodorow's theories. And many reviewers ultimately decided that the novel was a traditional and universal tale about the coming of age experiences of all girls. In fact, on the dust jacket of the book, one critic from the *San Francisco Chronicle* wrote that "women especially will learn much about their childhood through this eloquent, profound story."

It is quite understandable why almost all critics initially called on Chodorow to explicate Kincaid's *Annie John*. First of all, Chodorow's theories had become quite well-known and popular since their introduction in the seventies. And furthermore, Chodorow writes from the perspective of a Western feminist, and as a whole, Kincaid's fiction seems to have reached many more white, female, middle-class Americans than any other population. This is probably because Kincaid began publishing with *The New Yorker*, a magazine whose patrons are primarily white and middle-class as well.² It seems then, that Chodorow provided some critics with an ideal opportunity to connect Kincaid's experiences growing up in the Caribbean with their own, and generalize about the stages all girls pass through as they mature. Ultimately, the novel seems to have been accepted so readily because, at least on the surface, it confirmed the

²In an interview with Selwyn Cudjoe, Kincaid also acknowledges that her audience is probably mostly white. She says, "Since I wrote for *The New Yorker*, I assumed that only white people in the suburbs would be reading it" (221).
experiences of its white, female readers, that is it emphasized the destructive nature of a patriarchal system that devalues women and limits their role in society.

But A Small Place, which was published two years after Annie John and marked a dramatic change in the content and style of Kincaid’s writing, would eventually cast shadows on Annie John and question everything that had been theorized about it. In this book-length essay, which employs a second-person narrator, Kincaid confronts her readers with the horrors of Antigua’s history and its current status and implicates whites as oppressors:

An ugly thing, that is what you are when you become a tourist, an ugly, empty thing, a stupid thing, a piece of rubbish pausing here and there to gaze at this and at that, and it will never occur to you that the people who inhabit the place in which you have just paused cannot stand you. (17)

A Small Place, which Keith Byerman describes as an "anti-colonial polemic" (91) saw Kincaid, for the first time, become confrontational with her readers. And for white Westerners, who knew little about Antigua and the historical ramifications of colonialism, passages like the one above were shocking and offensive. No longer were readers greeted by a sad and lonely narrator who could not find her place in the world, but instead readers found themselves combating Kincaid’s accusations that white tourists who visit Antigua are as oppressive as the first British colonists who set foot on the island.

In A Small Place, however, Kincaid did not only level accusations at her white readers. She also revealed her disgust for the native Antiguans who continued the practices of the colonists long after the island gained
independence. Kincaid suggested that Antigua has been destroyed by people from abroad and home who seek power and entertainment by enslaving others. She indicated that colonialism has been particularly destructive to her small island because it taught the native Antiguans to become exactly like their oppressors.

Consequently, A Small Place did little to ingratiate Kincaid with American or European readers. The New Yorker refused to publish the essay, and although Kincaid eventually found a publishing house that would accept it, reviews of it were harsh and unsympathetic. Many critics found it difficult to believe that the same woman who had written At the Bottom of the River and Annie John could produce A Small Place. Where had Kincaid's anger come from? Why was she revealing her political views now? A Small Place created a great disturbance among reviewers and left many vowing to never read Kincaid's books again. Even today, many white Americans and Europeans have a difficult time finishing the essay.

However, while most of her readers were surprised by A Small Place, some writers felt that it was only a matter of time before issues of domination and oppression boiled over in Kincaid's work. In particular, Keith Byerman suggested that readers disliked the book so much because just as the European powers had once "reduced the natives of Antigua to objects of ridicule," Kincaid was now making the "visitor from the outside world the object of derision by the natives " (92).

Kincaid's fourth book, Lucy (1992), was also rejected by critics because it continued to point to the destructive nature of colonialism, while also critiquing race relations in America. Most scholars believe Lucy is a continuation of Annie
John, although Kincaid changed the protagonist's name. Lucy is set in the United States and details the thoughts and experiences of a young Antiguan woman who is trying to cope in the "New World," and fight any urge to return home to her mother. Moira Ferguson says readers were initially happy to see that in Lucy Kincaid had returned to writing fiction that continued to analyze the mother-daughter dyad, but many of her fans still felt betrayed by the political issues that had invaded the author's fiction, and decided to avoid the book (109).

In general, critics and readers rejected Kincaid's later novels because of their tone and inflammatory political stance. Reviewers did not like the works because they were forced to confront Kincaid as a black, Caribbean woman, something they had not allowed themselves to do before A Small Place was published. In fact, quite the opposite, critics and readers alike had stripped Kincaid of her heritage and race, when in Annie John they only acknowledged that the story was a traditional and universal coming of age experience. Shocked by the aggressive and angry narrator that is unleashed in A Small Place, many readers wondered why they did not see Kincaid's anger at the colonial powers in Annie John.

Almost immediately after A Small Place was published a growing number of scholars returned their attention to Annie John, concerned that they might have read the book out of its cultural context, and consequently overlooked the complexity of the novel. Caribbean literature as a whole was becoming more popular in the late eighties, and writers and critics from the region were demanding that the literature be considered for its unique qualities, rather than highlighting its universal elements. Thus, in her essay "Adolescent Rebellion and Gender Relations in At the Bottom of the River and Annie John," Helen
Pyne Timothy, a native of Jamaica, suggested that although the "stages of psychic development [in Annie John] take place within any culture," it is important for readers "to inquire whether, and in what ways, Kincaid has anchored the imaginative reworkings of these experiences within the particular culture of the Caribbean" (234). Likewise, in her essay, "Initiation in Jamaica Kincaid's Annie John," Donna Perry concluded that although Kincaid's books attract mostly white readers, her fiction, like that of "women of color and Third World women offers new myths of female development and new definitions of success" compared to the literature written by white female writers (246). For these two critics it became important to acknowledge that Kincaid's fiction shares some similarities with other Western writers. But they also found it significant to show how Kincaid's unique position as a female Antiguan impacted her work.

Today, A Small Place continues to influence scholars as they analyze Annie John. For instance, Moira Ferguson has completely abandoned Chodorow's model, and believes instead, that the intense relationship between the mother and daughter is a metaphor for the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Ferguson says

> that the relationships between Kincaid's female protagonists and their biological mothers are crucially formative yet, always meditated by intimations of life as colonized subjects. Jamaica Kincaid continually fuses diverse formulations of motherhood, maternity, and colonialism. Reflecting on these cross-over conjunctures, she demystifies the ideology of a colonial motherland. (1)
Ferguson concludes that in Kincaid's fiction the mother and the island of Antigua are "co-joined" (2-4).

Likewise, Laura Niesen de Abruna, in "Family Connections: Mother and Mother Country in the Fiction of Jean Rhys and Jamaica Kincaid," connects Kincaid's writing to a West Indian tradition, rejecting critics who treat her fiction as the psychological study of a white, Western female. Abruna purports that Kincaid is indebted to the Caribbean writer Jean Rhys because the latter "prepared the way" for the former by writing about the intense relationship between mothers and daughters, as the mother teaches the daughter the culturally accepted norms of the society (260). According to Abruna, Kincaid's fiction reflects many of the same themes that are present in Rhys's (260-262). Abruna believes that identifying the literary foremothers of Caribbean authors like Kincaid is significant because it suggests that they have their own cultural role models and traditions outside of the White, European establishment.

Significantly then, since the publication of A Small Place, reviewers and critics have begun to analyze Annie John as more than a "sweet" coming of age story. Rather, by moving beyond a feminist psychoanalytical approach to the novel they have discovered that Annie John is a deeply complex book, despite how simple and accessible it appears to be when first read. While not all critics have abandoned Chodorow's object relation's theory, many scholars have found more unique approaches to the novel, approaches that highlight Kincaid's cultural background, instead of downplaying it.

Kincaid herself seems more comfortable with the recent critiques completed on Annie John. In fact, since the publication of A Small Place, she has become increasingly vocal about her work, even suggesting to scholars
different approaches they should or should not adopt when reviewing her novels. For instance, when asked in an interview with Selwyn Cudjoe whether or not she thought her work fit in with other feminist writings, Kincaid responded,

You could place my writings there, but I could not. I wrote that way because that was the way I could write, so it does not feel to me that this is the way women write. My second book, Annie John, is about a girl's relationship with her mother because the fertile soil of my creative life is my mother. When I write, in some things I use my mother's voice, because I like my mother's voice. I like the way she sees things. (Cudjoe Interview 222)

In addition, when she was asked if she thought her writing was comparable to the novels written by African American women, Kincaid stated,

I think that American black people seem to feel—almost—that being black is a predestination in some way. They have a kind of nationalism about it that we don't have; black nationalism. Because they are a minority, they are more concerned with their identity being extinct, whereas we don't feel that way. Everybody is black. I mean, we don't think white people are permanent.

(Ferguson Interview 164)

Kincaid suggests, instead, that there are a multitude of voices and experiences in her fiction and consequently critics should be cautious when trying to categorize her writing. She says,

When people think of falling standards they must think of people like me who just sort of usurp all the boundaries and just mix them
up and just cross borders all the time. We just have no interest in the formalities. We are not interested in being literary people. We have something to say that is really urgent. (Ferguson Interview 166)

In general, Kincaid seems to hope that discussions about her novels will not be limited by the critic's interest in feminism or race relations, rather she wants her readers to acknowledge and understand all of the histories and cultures she has inherited and depicted in her novels.

In examining the reception of Kincaid's writing by reviewers and critics, one discovers that her fiction has surprised and challenged readers. For white Westerners, in particular, A Small Place has been disturbing because Kincaid emerges as a writer with a specific political agenda, that is she seeks to uncover the effects that the white, British colonists had on her country and her identity. But while A Small Place has made readers uncomfortable, it has at least encouraged scholars to take a special interest in Kincaid's position as a Caribbean writer, whereas early in her career many of her readers were less concerned with her cultural background. And one can only hope that critics will continue to address Kincaid's position as an Antiguan, as well as her position as a black female growing up in a post-colonial country, in the reviews and critiques that they write. And consequently, in the next chapter I will examine Annie John to identify the moments when Annie's position as a post-colonial figure problematizes her childhood, and in particular, her relationship with her mother.
RETURNING TO THE GIRL WITHIN

At that moment, I missed my mother more than I had ever imagined possible and wanted only to live somewhere quiet and beautiful with her alone, but also at that moment I wanted only to see her lying dead, all withered in a coffin at my feet.

- Annie John

Since the publication of Annie John in 1985, critics have been intrigued by the relationship between the mother and daughter in Jamaica Kincaid's second novel. Most often it is the extreme hate that the daughter expresses for her mother which takes reviewers off-guard. However, critics acknowledge that Annie not only hates her mother, she is also deeply in love with her. In fact, these two emotions are often expressed simultaneously and cause Annie great torment as she tries to decide how to react to her mother. For instance, in chapter six of the novel, Annie's mother confronts her daughter after discovering that she has been talking to three boys in town. The elder female accuses her daughter of being a slut, and young Annie responds out of embarrassment:

The word "slut" (in patois) was repeated over and over, until suddenly I felt as if I were drowning in a well but instead of the well being filled with water, it was filled with the word "slut" and it was pouring in through my eyes, my ears, my nostrils, my mouth. As if to save myself, I turned to her and said, "Well, like father like son, like mother like daughter."

At that, everything stopped. The whole earth fell silent. The two black things joined together in the middle of the room separated, hers going to her, mine coming back to me. I looked at
my mother. She seemed tired and old and broken. Seeing that, I felt happy and sad at the same time. I soon decided that happy was better, and I was just about to enjoy this feeling when she said, "Until this moment, in my whole life I knew that, without any exception, I loved you best," and then she turned her back and started again to prepare the green figs for cooking. (103)

Throughout Annie John the reader is greeted by similar scenes that reveal Annie's inability to completely love or hate her mother. Just when Annie believes that she can safely rejoice in her mother's pain, something occurs to knock her off balance and leave her tormented. But while most scholars conclude that Annie's confused emotions are a natural result of the young girl's psychological development as she learns to model her behavior after her mother and then separate from her mother to establish her individuality, I suggest that Annie's conflicted emotions signal something much more ominous and disturbing about the relationship that the mother and daughter share.

Annie's inability to decide how to treat her mother is symptomatic of the conflicting messages she receives from her parent. When she is still a child, Annie's mother presents to her daughter an attractive vision of the West Indian female, characterizing her as a figure with strength, beauty, and power. But as her daughter matures, her mother drastically alters that vision, encouraging her daughter to be passive, obedient, and sexless—attributes that are favored by the British colonizers who controlled many of the educational, religious, and political institutions in Antigua. Consequently, Annie grows up trying to understand how the two separate visions can be united in one woman, her mother. And she struggles to choose the vision that will allow her to find favor
with her mother, but most importantly with herself. This chapter then, examines the unique effects that Annie's status as a post-colonial figure has on her maturation and the development of her identity.

It is in chapter two of the novel, "The Circling Hand," that readers first learn of the intimate relationship that Annie and her mother share. Taking baths, shopping, cooking, and cleaning the house are all activities that mother and daughter joyfully complete together. In fact, Annie specifically notes that her mother makes a conscious effort to include her in everything. And the young girl is particularly impressed with her mother's domestic abilities, as well as the power she asserts when they go to the market. Annie says, "How important I felt to be with my mother. For many people, their wares and provisions laid out in front of them, would brighten up when they saw her coming and would try to get her attention" (16). The elder female is adored by her daughter, and alternately, she praises and dotes on her daughter as well. Repeatedly in chapter two, Annie tells stories about her mother's special accomplishments, concluding that her mother is very independent and powerful.

In particular, Annie contrasts her mother's bravery with her father's complacency. About her mother Annie says,

> When my mother, at sixteen, after quarreling with her father, left his house on Dominica and came to Antigua, she packed all her things in an enormous wooden trunk that she had bought in Roseau for almost six shillings. She painted the trunk yellow and green outside, and she lined the inside with wallpaper that had a cream background with pink roses printed all over it. Two days
after she left her father's house, she boarded a boat and sailed for
Antigua. It was a small boat, and the trip would have taken a day
and a half ordinarily, but a hurricane blew up and the boat was lost
at sea for almost five days. By the time it got to Antigua, the boat
was practically in splinters, and though two or three of the
passengers were lost overboard, along with some of the cargo, my
mother and her trunk were safe. (19-20)

As a young child, Annie views her mother as determined and self-sufficient.
Her mother's departure from Dominica and her oppressive father is particularly
important because it reveals that Annie's mother did not succumb to the
pressures of a patriarchal figure. Rather, Annie's mother disobeyed her father by
leaving his home and moving to a different country by herself. And
significantly, Annie's mother gives to her daughter the same trunk she used to
make her journey from Dominica to Antigua. The mother then passes on to her
daughter one of the instruments she used to assert her own independence and
power. The trunk serves as a kind of symbol for Annie's independence and
power as well.

In contrast, Annie's father does not venture out into the world to assert
himself:

When he was a little boy, his parents, after kissing him goodbye and
leaving him with his grandmother, boarded a boat and sailed to
South America. He never saw them again, though they wrote to
him and sent him presents--packages of clothes on his birthday and
at Christmas. He then grew to love his grandmother, and she loved
him, for she took care of him and worked hard at keeping him well
fed and clothed. From the beginning, they slept in the same bed, and as he became a young man they continued to do so. When he was no longer in school and had started working, every night, after he and his grandmother had eaten their dinner, my father would go off to visit his friends. He would then return home at around midnight and fall asleep next to his grandmother. In the morning his grandmother would awake at half past five or so, a half hour before my father, and prepare his bath and breakfast and make everything proper and ready for him, so that at seven o'clock sharp he stepped out the door off to work. One morning though, he overslept because his grandmother didn't wake him up. When he awoke, she was still lying next to him. When he tried to wake her, he couldn't. She had died, lying next to him sometime during the night. Even though he was overcome with grief, he built her a coffin and made sure she had a nice funeral. He never slept in that bed again, and shortly afterward he moved out of that house. He was eighteen years old then. (23)

Annie's father does not exhibit any motivation to leave home and establish his own life and identity. On the contrary, Kincaid presents a very passive and content male figure. Annie's father is treated like a child all the years that he spends with his grandmother. He is dependent on her to make him meals and insure that he wakes up for work on time. He leaves her house only when she dies and he no longer has anyone to coddle him. The story of Annie's father is clearly contrasted with the mother's tale, and the result is that Annie sees the mother as the more attractive of the two figures. For example, Annie marvels at
her mother's ability to pay for her own trunk and survive the brutal sea. But she pities her father because he lost his grandmother and no longer had anyone to take care of him.

In chapter two, Annie also learns about the secret powers of the obeah women. While bathing with her mother, young Annie watches her add ingredients to their bath water to ward off the evil spells of women from the community. Her mother would then carefully clean her daughter's body and her own, covering their skin with the special water. For Annie, the experience was very sensual and mysterious. The baths could eliminate germs from the house, or bad feelings between friends. But the spells were only practiced by the women, and consequently, Annie came to cherish her mother even more because of her wisdom.

Diane Simmons confirms that in *Annie John* the mother presents the daughter with an unmistakable model of African-based female power, that of the obeah woman--one who can follow the shifting nature of reality, who can see through disguises, who can move swiftly to thwart evil forces and protect her own, who boldly decides what she wants and moves to get it.

As a young child, Annie is introduced to a world that favors the female as well as the African-Caribbean culture. Consequently, she has little interest in her father, and wishes only to remain with the beautiful, strong, and intelligent mother that she sees before her.

Donna Perry concludes that the lessons about power that the mother and daughter share early in Annie's life are not typically found in the novels written
by white women from Western industrialized nations. Rather, it is in the "novels by women of color, particularly women from outside the United States," that one sees "images of strong, autonomous women abound" (247). For Perry, the mother exhibits a supreme understanding of the power that surrounds her in nature and in the supernatural realm, and does not hesitate to reveal her insights to her daughter (250).

The events and stories from Annie's childhood have a significant impact on the rest of her life, as she will never forget the intimacy that she first shared with her mother. Also, she will continue to expect her mother to wield her power and beauty in the daily activities that the two characters confront together. Annie's earliest experiences with her mother suggest that the mother controls the world, and she controls her daughter's happiness in the world as well. Annie's mother remembers every detail of her daughter's childhood, and even the temperament of her child before she was born. The mother is quite literally the center of Annie's universe, and the supreme power who decides what will take place in Annie's self-described paradise.

However, when Annie turns ten she begins to learn that her mother's power is not only employed to create a pleasant and beautiful world for her daughter. Annie sees that her mother's reach extends beyond the home and into the community, where Annie is not always her mother's primary concern. This realization occurs in chapter one of the novel when Annie moves to a new home for the summer.

Before her family moved, Annie did not know anyone who had died, nor did she comprehend "that children died" (4). But in her new house on Fort Road, Annie is bored with her surroundings and subsequently busies herself by
concentrating on the two events in the community that consistently occur: people die and their families have funerals. Day after day, she waits in her back yard for the funeral processions, and is extremely disappointed if the figures never appear, even though Annie announces that she is "afraid of the dead" (4). Her mother has told her that they can reappear at any moment, and "steal" a little girl away with them (4). Annie is horrified by this possibility because she cannot imagine being separated from her powerful mother.

While the chapter begins with the young protagonist knowing next to nothing about death, she quickly comes in contact with more and more people who die, and more importantly, her mother is often present when the deaths occur, or else is intimately involved in the burial preparations of the dead. In fact, Annie begins to connect death with her mother and refuses her mother's touch after she prepares the body of a young girl for burial. Helen Pyne Timothy suggests that Annie is experiencing the first "indication" that she and her mother are not one unit or an "integrated personality" (234). Thus, even though Annie is still very much enamored by her mother, she understands that there is a strange link between the death of these children and the maternal figure. And Timothy says that perhaps Annie worries that she too will die in her mother's arms (235).

Despite her fears, however, Annie spends a significant amount of her free time attending the funerals of people she does not know. In an effort to understand her mother's role in the burials of so many of the community's children and adults, Annie studies dead bodies, looking for some sign to help her comprehend how the deaths impact her individual life. In addition, Timothy says that Annie is interested in "cultural habits" surrounding the burial of the
dead (235). Clearly, says Timothy, "the details of the death rituals as delineated are strongly indicative of Caribbean cultural habits," particularly those practiced by the obeah women (235). For instance,

Annie’s mother must of necessity be available to her neighbor in times of sickness and death; she must assist in transporting the child to the doctor, must help with the laying out of the body, must support and nurture the mother through the time of grieving.

(Timothy 235)

Thus, in Annie’s "attempts at role-modeling she wishes to become schooled and to penetrate the secrets of the ritual so she can be like her mother, an important person in a gender-binding ritual" (Timothy 235).

Chapter one then is extremely important to the novel because it signals one of the first moments when Annie is forced to acknowledge that she and her mother may not always be together. This is a frightening prospect, one that perhaps all women around the world must confront as they mature. But while Annie does not want to be separated from her mother and experiences some internal turmoil after reflecting on the possibility, she also learns that in the Caribbean, at least among the women, death is a community experience and may bring some people together, even while it separates others. In the same way that Annie’s mother takes care of the dead girl, and comforts her mother, Annie shares her stories about the dead with friends at school. The African-Caribbean world that Annie's mother is initiating her into requires that she acknowledge her separation from her mother, but it also offers her a supportive and magical community of women friends.
In contrast, when Annie John turns twelve, she not only experiences a
great physical and emotional separation from her mother, but she is also
encouraged to abandon the rituals of the African-Caribbean community she was
originally introduced to as a young girl. In its place, Annie discovers a world
filled with strict new rules that are delivered not by her pretty mother, but "a
shriveled-up old spinster from Lanvashire, England" (28).

Twelve is the age in which Annie begins to visibly mature:

My legs had become more spindle-like, the hair on my head even
more unruly than usual, small tufts of hair had appeared under my
arms, and when I perspired the smell was strange, as if I had turned
into a strange animal. (Annie John 25)

The young protagonist suggests to the reader that these physical changes were
clearly obvious, but Annie also notes that her parents did not seem to notice. At
least, her mother did not discuss with her daughter in any explicit way why
Annie's body was changing, nor did she signal what other changes Annie might
expect in the future. For Annie, her mother's inability to acknowledge the
physical transformations was particularly bothersome, especially because the
mother had previously spent so much time noting all the details of Annie's life.

However, even though Annie's mother does not discuss the physical
changes Annie is experiencing, she does indicate that the mother-daughter
relationship will not remain the same as a result of Annie's maturity. For
example, the mother will no longer allow her daughter to dress exactly like her,
nor will she spend time telling Annie stories about the young girl's childhood.
Instead Annie is "sent off to learn one thing and another" from English spinsters
(27). Her mother tells her that she is becoming a "young lady," and with that
new position comes new responsibilities as well. But Annie does not understand why her mother refuses to teach her what she needs to know, and instead sends her to the homes of other women. Annie purposefully gets herself in trouble in order to be sent home to spend time with her mother. But her bad behavior only makes her mother ignore and reject the protagonist even more.

Timothy concludes that although the mother is a supreme role-model when Annie is a little girl, she is unable to continue in that position when Annie becomes sexually awakened because the mother is "ambivalent about her own sexuality" (238). As a young adult, the mother left her father and moved to Antigua on her own, a move that symbolized the mother's own possession of her body and future. But in Antigua, Annie's mother married a man thirty-five years older than she because a woman would not be respected without a husband, nor could she insure her well-being.

With regards to the role and position of the female, the Caribbean and English cultural expectations differed dramatically. The Caribbean culture, at least the obeah women within this culture, valued the sensual nature of the female body. The woman was viewed as a central figure in the household as well as outside of it because of her mysterious powers and visions. However, Abruna states that English cultural standards, which were "a combination of Victorian ideology and regressive religious views," taught women to use their bodies to attain social status (278-279). A woman was only seen as valuable if she was sexually pure. While a man could have as many partners as he desired, as Annie's father had, a woman had to remain a virgin if she wished to marry well. And when she married, her sexuality became the possession of the male (Abruna 281).
For herself, Abruna suggests that Annie's mother has accepted the English cultural expectations, but her daughter's maturity is a reminder of what a woman must abandon in order to gain security (281). Annie's mother seems to understand that if her daughter is ever to find a husband and have a home, she too must also relinquish her sensual nature. She must conform to the gender expectations of the cultural community. Consequently, she sends Annie out into the community to learn the English values. But the English cultural standards clash completely with the African-Caribbean culture into which Annie has already been introduced. Thus, the young girl is confused by her mother's inability to show Annie the appropriate way to act, and Annie's new teachers are not helping her because their expectations conflict with the lessons Annie has already learned.

In one of the most powerful scenes in the novel, Annie returns home from Sunday school, anxious to show her mother an award she has won. She hopes to win back her mother's good favor with her award, but instead she finds her mother and father in bed together making love. Annie says she did not care what they were doing,

only that my mother's hand was on the small of my father's back and that it was making a circular motion. But her hand! It was white and bony, as if it had long been dead and had been left out in the elements. It seemed not to be her hand, and yet it could only be her hand, so well did I know it. It went around and around in the same circular motion, and I looked at it as if I would never see anything else in my life again. (30-31)
For the first time, Annie views her mother in an intimate relationship with her father, and the mother is no longer in a dominant position, rather her mother's hand looks "dead," as if she is being drained by the physical experience. Annie realizes that her mother is participating in an intimate act with the father, yet has ceased to acknowledge her daughter's physicality by ignoring her maturing body, and discontinuing the close relationship the mother and daughter once shared. Indeed, Annie's mother seems unable to "transmit to her daughter a coherent value system that embraces the various aspects of her role as a woman in Caribbean society," including her sexual obligations to her husband (Timothy 239). As a result, Annie feels betrayed by her mother, who previously took such great care in showing Annie the proper ways to act, but now is virtually ignoring her daughter's maturity, and yet at the same time is blatantly expressing her own sexuality.

Sensing her inability to gain access to her mother, and to her own changing identity in this new state of becoming a woman, Annie retreats to a more idealized situation where she can still be a child and avoid her maturity. The only identity she knows is the one her mother gave to her when she was a little girl and they looked through the trunk together. Now she has no idea what she is to become, and her mother offers her no verbal explanations. Consequently, since Annie cannot continue to be the happy and assertive child she once was with her mother, she seeks out others who will allow her to continue in that role, despite the physical changes in her body.

It is in school that Annie attains some relief from her mother and her own identity crisis. For in school, Annie comes in contact with other young girls who are also witnessing the same physical changes that the protagonist
experienced. And when Annie first arrives at the school, anxious because she does not know anyone, she almost immediately senses that the girls before her have connected to each other in the same way Annie once connected to her mother.

All around me were other people my age—twelve years—girls and boys, dressed in their school uniforms, marching off to school. They all seemed to know each other, and as they met they would burst into laughter, slapping each other on shoulder and back, telling each other things that must have made for so much happiness. I saw some girls wearing the same uniform as my own, and my heart just longed for them to say something to me, but the most they could do to include me was to smile and nod something in my direction as they walked on arm in arm. (34)

Annie John understands that in school she has some hope of finding a friend who will be her mirror image, the way her mother once was. The intimacies the girls share, hugging, kissing, and sitting in each other's laps, makes Annie long for someone to treat her the same way. She promises herself to do whatever she can to attain the joys that the girls around her are experiencing.

When the teacher assigns the girls in Annie's class to each write their own autobiography, the young protagonist realizes that this is her opportunity to create a new world, one in which she hopes to be the "center" (41). In her essay, Annie tells a dramatic story about her mother and herself. In the story, Annie and her female parent are swimming in the ocean together. Annie is afraid of the water, so she can only wade close to the shore, but her mother is so proficient at swimming that she knows when a shark is nearby or when a jellyfish is about
to sting her. Annie says, "When she plunged into the seawater, it was as if she had always lived there" (42).

The mother and daughter enjoy their time together until a ship passes in front of Annie's view and draws her attention away from her swimming mother. The ship is probably filled with tourists, as Annie notes that they are blowing horns and cheering. Diane Simmons concludes as well that the vessels might "represent the three ships of Columbus's voyage (108)," symbolic of the rowdy colonists who arrived in the Caribbean after their long voyage from Europe. But either way, the noisy passengers are dangerous because they isolate the daughter from the mother. When she turns her attention back to the sea, Annie can no longer locate her mother. She begins to worry that she will never be together with her mother again. Eventually, though the mother returns to the shore, and promises her crying daughter that she will never leave her.

Annie's teacher and classmates love her story, and she indeed becomes the center of attention. In fact, the teacher decides to keep her essay and include it in the classroom library. Annie feels deeply satisfied with the adoration she receives from her new classmates as well. But she is also somewhat guilty about the story because it depicts her "old" relationship with her mother, and not the current separation from her mother that Annie is enduring. The ship filled with tourists is perhaps a sign that even though Annie wishes things were the same with her mother, something foreign and powerful has already come between them, even in her memories. But the story does temporarily allow Annie to restore her childhood paradise, because on that first day of school, she meets her very best friend, Gwen.
With Gwen at her side, Annie no longer worries about her separation from her mother because she has found a new companion who will attend to her secrets and fears in the way Annie's mother used to. Annie does not feel isolated anymore:

Gwen and I were soon inseparable. If you saw one, you saw the other. For me, each day began as I waited for Gwen to come by and fetch me for school. My heart beat fast as I stood in the front yard of our house waiting to see Gwen as she rounded the bend in our street. The sun, already way up in the sky so early in the morning, shone on her, and the whole street became suddenly empty so that Gwen and everything about her were perfect, as if she were in a picture. (47)

The very same perfection Annie once discovered in her mother, she now attributes to Gwen. Together the two girls wield a kind of power that is attractive to the other females around them. Annie becomes more popular in school and thrives both in the classroom and outside of it. She has once again found a community of females, not unlike the community of women she was introduced to as a child.

But even in school and with Gwen, Annie cannot escape from her quickly-maturing body. When she begins menstruating before Gwen or any of the other girls in her class, Annie is again forced to confront a future that she cannot predict. In the back of the school, sitting on the tombstones of the white colonists who first conquered Antigua and enslaved Annie's ancestors, the girls all gather to watch her show them her underwear and to hear her explain the physical pain she is feeling. It seems that Annie cannot avoid her future as a
"young lady." And ironically, she finds herself on the tombstones of the very people who introduced the "young lady" business to the island, and to Annie's mother. Although Annie is not conscious of it yet, her love for Gwen will be tainted with hate by the very same force that destroyed the blissfulness she experienced with her mother. For Annie's period is another sign that she will eventually be unable to escape from being indoctrinated into the English culture. Annie unhappily hints at this when she says,

When I looked at them sitting around me, the church in the distance, beyond that our school, with throngs of girls crossing back and forth in the school-yard, beyond that the world, how I wished that everything would fall away, so that suddenly we'd be sitting in some different atmosphere, with no future full of ridiculous demands, no need for any sustenance save our love for each other, with no hindrance to any of our desires, which would, of course, be simple desires—nothing, nothing, just sitting on our tombstones forever. But that could never be, as the tolling of the school bell testified. (53)

Annie seems to realize that as the school bell calls her forward to class, so does her maturation lead her to a future of unnecessary rules and stifling responsibilities.

But before Annie discovers the source of her conflicted feelings for her mother and Gwen, she makes one more attempt to return to the paradise of her youth. One day, while Annie is trying to knock a guava from a tree, a girl dressed in rags with dirty skin and dirty red hair volunteers to retrieve the fruit.
for her. Annie instantly falls in love with the girl and the two begin to visit each other, unbeknownst to Annie's mother.

The Red Girl, as Annie calls her for her "penny" colored hair (56), does not participate in any of the activities Annie is required to complete. She does not bathe or comb her hair. She does not brush her teeth or go to Sunday school. In fact, in the Red Girl's world nothing is forbidden. The child can do whatever she pleases and most of her extra-curricular events are forbidden to Annie. In particular, the Red Girl is a champion at shooting marbles, and she teaches Annie too to play and win at the game.

As Annie and the Red Girl become more familiar with each other, Annie begins to lie to her mother, to hide things from her, and to disobey her parent whenever she thinks she will not be caught. She proudly stashes marbles and books under the house, realizing that if she is discovered her punishment will be great. Moira Ferguson concludes that the marbles and books are "treasures that identify rebellion against constraining gender roles, a personal power gained by outwitting authority" (54). Thus, when Annie's mother does suspect that her daughter is participating in forbidden activities, and tries to persuade her daughter to reveal the marbles, Annie is not easily fooled by her mother's sweet voice and relishes her mother's frustrations.

Annie's relations with the Red Girl help her temporarily escape from the rules that have begun to control Annie's life both at school and at home. With the Red Girl propriety is not an issue, as she constantly seeks to test her limits, and Annie's as well. Annie has to work hard to keep up with her new friend's bravery. She brings the Red Girl presents and allows the girl to pinch her and kiss her, a ritual that Annie describes as "delicious" (63). She is clearly
subservient to the Red Girl, but does not seem to mind that she has to work hard to please her friend. In fact, Annie seems to enjoy the fact that she sometimes has to experience pain for the Red Girl to receive pleasure. Perhaps because in her relationship with her mother, Annie tried to please, but her offerings went unnoticed by her female parent--she received neither kisses nor pinches from her. For Annie, it has become better to feel something concrete rather than confusion, which seems to feel like nothing at all.

But while the Red Girl offers Annie a vision of what her future might look like unfettered by the community's rules for how a "lady" should act, she eventually moves away, leaving Annie to face her mother and her uncertain future alone. Interestingly, the Red Girl's departure is also linked to Annie's maturity because she leaves soon after the protagonist begins to menstruate. However, the Red Girl does enable Annie to challenge the rules of the colonial power and survive. For as she disobeys her mother and her teachers, she realizes that her resistance to these people and forces will not necessarily destroy her. In fact, Annie finds that she obtains some power, or at the least some satisfaction, from seeing her mother crawl on her hands and knees under the house to try and find the marbles. Annie has learned that even if she cannot destroy the forces that have eliminated her paradise, she can resist them.

Annie's subconscious animosity for the colonial powers becomes obvious when she recounts the dream she had on the night the Red Girl moved away:

For a reason not having to do with me, she had been sent to Anguilla to live with her grandparents and finish her schooling. The night of the day I heard about it, I dreamed of her. I dreamed that the boat on which she had been traveling suddenly splintered
in the middle of the sea, causing passengers to drown except for her, whom I rescued in a small boat. I took her to an island, where we lived together, forever, I suppose, and fed on wild pigs and sea grapes. At night, we would sit on the sand and watch ships filled with people on a cruise steam by. We sent confusing signals to the ships, causing them to crash on some nearby rocks. How we laughed as their cries of joy turned to cries of sorrow. (70-71)

In Annie's dream she destroys the foreign intruders who come to vacation in the Caribbean by employing what seems like the magic of the obeah woman, whom Annie became familiar with as a young girl. The two girls cast spells on their unknowing victims, and thrive on their power and control. Annie, in particular, seems to be making a choice between the two cultural communities, favoring the Caribbean cultural community over any other because it allows her to enjoy close relations with other women, whereas the colonial empire is only anxious to mold her into an ideal wife and mother so that she can please a man.

After the Red Girl departs, Annie's relationship with her mother becomes fraught with more conflict and pain. But before Annie is completely capable of confronting her mother, she engrosses herself in her classroom studies, gleaning from her textbooks that the colonial powers have rewritten the history of Antigua as well as that of all of the West Indies, so that the British and Spanish are not portrayed as the brutal murderers they were. It is in chapter five of the novel, "Columbus in Chains," that Annie finally comprehends the power that the colonizers employ to manipulate her and ultimately construct her identity. Bored by the work that she is required to complete in class, Annie reads ahead in her book, intrigued by the pictures and captions that depict Columbus in chains.
on one of his return voyages to Europe. Christopher Columbus is credited with discovering Antigua, and he is presented to Antiguan girls and boys as a hero. However, Annie does not view him as such.

For Annie, Columbus is an evil figure glaring out at her from the book. She does not like the way he casually stands so proudly in front of the islands and people he has conquered. She is only too happy to see him locked in chains. After viewing the picture, Annie connects Columbus's unfortunate circumstances with her grandfather's own ailments. Annie's mother receives a letter from Ma Chess indicating that her husband is incapacitated. Annie's mother is happy to learn that the parent who caused her so much grief in her youth is no longer mobile. She says, "So the great man can no longer just get up. How I would love to see his face now!" (78) Annie connects the injustices her grandfather leveled at her mother with Columbus's injustices, and under the picture of the discoverer Annie writes, "The Great Man Can No Longer Just Get Up and Go" (78). With this defiant act, Annie is clearly announcing that she understands how power is used to control an individual like her mother, or a nation like Antigua.

Abruna confirms that for Annie "the grandfather's attempts to control the body of his daughter is similar to the colonials' attempts to own women's bodies" (283). Only Abruna suggests that the grandfather might have been even more successful than the colonists because he at least remained a physical threat to his daughter longer than the colonists (283).

Annie is punished for her act when the teacher sees that she has defaced the book, and as a result she is forced to copy books one and two from Paradise Lost. Because she obviously did not learn her lessons the first time, and because
she did not accept the authority of the colonial empire to interpret her country's history, she is given another colonial text with the hope that perhaps this time she will not be so resistant.

And in fact, near the end of the book, we see that Annie John cannot resist the outside pressures that are demanding she conform to the expectations of the colonial power. In "The Long Rain," Annie becomes ill with a mysterious condition. It rains for three months while Annie is confined to her bed, and the water washes away parts of the island as well as the mother's garden. Everything is saturated from the water, symbolic of Annie's inability to absorb any more of her surroundings. She is physically and emotionally spent and can no longer wage wars against her mother or her teachers at school.

Annie's mother sends for a doctor, but he cannot determine that anything is wrong with the girl, and perhaps this is because he values the wisdom of the English colonists and not the Caribbeans. It is only Ma Chess and her obeah magic that calms Annie and helps her through her illness. With Ma Chess, Annie once again feels connected to a mother figure who cares only about the health and well-being of the girl and not about her future as a colonial subject.

During Annie's illness, she experiences peculiar dreams, sensing that she is growing larger, and then smaller. She is unable to control her perceptions of the world around her, nor is she capable of feeding herself. And language too, becomes jumbled and confused. Annie thinks that she hears people speaking but she cannot make out their words. But perhaps most interesting, Annie washes away the faces and body parts of her family members on the pictures that are sitting on her bureau. Says Diane Simmons, "She is trying to wash away the
falseness and vileness of the world. She obliterates all the faces but her own, for everyone she knows seems guilty of falseness" (116).

But just as the rains come, they also leave after Annie has been nurtured and healed by Ma Chess. She is still in a delicate state, but strong enough to survive on her own, despite her discomfort around her mother. But Annie knows that she cannot stay on the island for much longer, for next time she will not be able to withstand the pressures to conform.

There is a kind of double-negotiation occurring in Annie's life. Not only is she being forced to separate from her mother, an act that is probably most necessary for her to establish her own identity, but she is also being forced away from the Antiguan culture, from the land which played an important role in helping her establish her sense of self as a young girl. Maturation for Annie then is a particularly tragic and psychically draining time. The young woman cannot depend on her mother to show her the path to adulthood, and she can no longer rely on the cultural setting of Antigua to help her establish an identity, because that history is being rewritten in front of her. It is no wonder then that the story of a young Antiguan girl is fraught with so much conflict between feelings of love and hate. Annie is denied her relationship with her mother, and in its place she is taught to respect an old and wrinkled white woman who wears a crown, and is clearly not connected to the black faces that inhabit Annie's world.

Many critics like Moira Ferguson suggest that Annie's mother is ultimately responsible for her daughter's breakdown. In fact, Ferguson concludes that the mother becomes a tiny model of England, passing onto her daughter the gender expectations of the colonists, as well as indoctrinating her daughter into that educational system which will eventually lead to her
conforming to the political and social rules of the English society (1-2). But although Annie's mother does encourage her daughter to become a "young lady," she is also a woman deeply confused about the value of one cultural system over another. For instance, when Annie becomes ill, the mother sends for the doctor, but when he cannot determine Annie's sickness, the mother accepts the arrival of Ma Chess and her obeah magic. The mother seems to comprehend that some of the English technological advances cannot replace the Caribbean practices that have proven effective for hundreds of years.

In addition, the mother's confusion has not escaped Annie because she is also divided over the education she has received at the hands of the British teachers. The mother seems to have given to her daughter the same confusion she herself feels. And consequently, Annie attempts to sort through the confusion in precisely the same way her mother tried.

In the last chapter of Jamaica Kincaid's novel, Annie John prepares to leave her Antiguan homeland for England. She rejects her mother's trunk because of the anger and confusion she feels toward her mother, and instead asks her father to build her a trunk to hold her own belongings, and her own newly emerging identity. Annie cannot forgive her mother because she believes that her female parent offered her daughter one cultural identity and then snatched it away from her, demanding that Annie conform to the foreign rules of the colonial empire.

With all of her possessions packed in her trunk, Annie contemplates the happiness she will find in her new life, and the oppression she will escape by leaving the island. While she is alternately saddened and joyful to be leaving her mother behind, she knows that her journey is necessary if she is to escape the
unbearable pain that she now confronts. No longer can she face her mother whom she considers a betrayer. She says,

Why, I wonder, didn't I see the hypocrite in my mother when, over the years, she said that she loved me and could hardly live without me, while at the same time proposing and arranging separation after separation, including this one, which unbeknownst to her, I have arranged to be permanent? (133)

Annie believes that her departure from the island signifies her rejection of her mother, but in reality her emancipatory act parallels her mother's own life journey. The mother also left home and abandoned an oppressive parent when she was a young girl. But while Annie's mother later negotiated her independence and self-control for security, one can only hope that her daughter will not find herself overcome by the same societal pressures.

But at the conclusion of Annie John, the reader can only speculate what will happen to Annie in the future. Her mother tells her that "It doesn't matter what you do or where you go, I'll always be your mother and this will always be your home" (147). These words disturb the young woman because they are a reminder of how intimately she is attached to this world that has betrayed her gender, her cultural background, and her own personal history with her mother. So Annie leaves, elated and saddened at the same time. In the last sentence of the novel, Annie describes the sound of the waves as they lap against the boat that is taking her away from home, as "making an unexpected sound, as if a vessel filled with liquid had been placed on its side and now was slowly emptying out" (148). Kincaid seems to suggest that Annie too is hearing all of the hurt, confusion, and anger empty from herself as well. As readers we can
only hope that what Annie chooses to put in her vessel will be as fulfilling and as freeing as the first objects she discovered in the paradise she shared with her mother as a young girl. For as much as Annie's story is about leaving her mother and the cultural demands of the English empire, it is also about returning to the girl within, who has a magical connection to a community of females who value the African-Caribbean traditions.
A VERY LARGE PLACE:
JAMAICA KINCAID COMES TO AMERICA

In Ten is the Age of Darkness, Geta LeSeur asserts that most West Indian authors spend a significant amount of their life writing stories and novels about their childhood. Childhood in the West Indies is usually a joyous experience because "no matter how poor one is, the child is nurtured by the village and the community" (3). But, says LeSeur, childhood is also a tragic time because children are subtly being indoctrinated into the European culture and usually do not become cognizant of this until they are adults (2-3). LeSeur suggests then, that because West Indian writers are trying to make sense of both the happy and horrible events that transpired during their childhood, many find that they cannot move beyond their childhood stories when they write.

Jamaica Kincaid's fiction, like many West Indian writers, is focused almost exclusively on the experiences of a young protagonist, who Kincaid has admitted is herself. Beginning with some of her earliest essays that were printed in The New Yorker's "Talk of the Town" column, Kincaid often speaks in her childhood voice, harkening back to Antigua, a place she describes as both a paradise and a hell. And in fact, her first two novels are first-person accounts of a child's confrontations with this Antiguan world. While Lucy, her third novel, presents the thoughts of a young adult, the character is also contemplating her childhood relationship with her mother. Kincaid has often said that she writes "in her mother's voice, because she likes her mother's voice," (Cudjoe Interview 222) but the truth is that she seems to be haunted by her childhood self even more.
One would naturally expect and perhaps hope that eventually Kincaid would move beyond those childhood stories, that her fiction would continue to mirror her life, now that of a forty-six year old. Today Kincaid is a mother, giving birth to a daughter Annie in 1985, and a son Harold in 1988. Will we ever hear about these experiences? Will we see young Annie John grow up and have children of her own? Since the publication of Lucy, Kincaid has not ventured into her adult world to share with us her current experiences. Nor has she written extensively about the United States, a country in which she has now resided longer than Antigua. Rather, she has done quite the opposite by turning to history books and genealogy charts to understand how it was that her ancestors came to live in Antigua, and to learn how their quality of life affected her childhood. She began this trek with the publication of A Small Place in 1988, and extended her studies in 1989 with the short story, "Ovando." And today she continues to investigate Antigua's history as well as the origins of colonialism in her current projects. Thus, this chapter will examine the voice that has evolved in the essays and stories Kincaid has written since publishing Annie John.

In the anti-colonial polemic A Small Place, Kincaid shows her readers what more than three hundred years of colonization has done to the native people of Antigua, who now mimic their master, even though the master has packed his bags and gone back to England. In fact, Kincaid suggests that life may even be worse in Antigua since the end of colonial rule in 1967. While the colonists eventually decided that it was unethical to maintain economic and political control over an island that was thousands of miles away, they never tried to assist the Antiguans in establishing their own nation. Thus, the power structures that the British created in Antigua still exist there to this day.
Many critics initially thought that Kincaid wrote A Small Place as a kind of "guilt piece," hoping to shame her white readers into admitting that the Western powers have been historically evil in their treatment of other peoples who express different physical and cultural characteristics. The New Yorker editor, Robert Gottlieb, refused to publish the essay because he thought it would increase racial anxiety among white and black readers alike (Simmons 22). And, as reviews of the novel indicated, the essay did make white readers uncomfortable and combative. But today, many critics like Diane Simmons and Moira Ferguson suggest that this essay is really not about dividing the races or making white people feel guilty about colonialism; it is Kincaid's attempt to teach everyone about the danger of embracing power relationships, be it in our private or public lives. Simmons says,

Kincaid works here to explain to white readers the incredibly complex effect, on white and black alike, of centuries of domination, showing them their own continued participation in a way that may not have been visible to them before. She is also trying to explain, to herself as well, what the psychological effects of slavery, colonialism, and their aftermath have been for the black residents of Antigua. (137)

In essence, Simmons proposes that Kincaid is not only trying to show how colonialism has destroyed her "small place," she also wants her readers to know how it has impacted all of the places we inhabit, be they small or large.

The short story "Ovando," furthers the discussion about power relationships as it tries to recreate for readers the moment when European colonists first invaded the Caribbean and confronted the Carib and Arawak
Indians, who were the indigenous people of Antigua and the surrounding islands. Published in *Conjunctions*, the story was a bit too experimental for *The New Yorker*, and consequently Kincaid decided to publish it elsewhere, perhaps guessing that the magazine would not accept it anyway. In "Ovando," an unnamed narrator, presumably living in our contemporary world, is confronted at home by the Spanish knight, Fray Nicolas de Ovando, who was appointed by King Ferdinand in 1501 as head of the Spanish settlement in Haiti and Santo Domingo, and eventually rampaged many of the surrounding Caribbean islands (Watson 120-125). Ovando, who appears to the narrator bloodied in his four-hundred-year-old battle garb, has come to talk to his unsuspecting victim about how he has conquered Caribbean countries in the past, and his ultimate plans to conquer the globe. The narrator, whom Moira Ferguson suggests has the disposition of an Arawak, peaceful people who were subjected to horrendous acts by the colonists, welcomes Ovando into her home, concerned about his tattered clothing and wounds (133). But although the narrator is initially receptive to Ovando, she becomes combative after hearing him talk, perhaps reacting much in the same way the Indians did four-hundred years earlier.

In "Ovando," Kincaid conflates the past and present by introducing the historical figure to the contemporary world and suggests to us that colonialism is a phenomena that reaches through time and still affects the colonial power and those who were colonized. But she also reminds us that the Spanish, English, French, and the remaining European powers who participated in the act could not finally conquer the world. And eventually, in their ambition they destroyed themselves. Significantly then, the narrator decides that even though Ovando
deserves to die, she does not need to kill him because his "timeless" infatuation with power has already destroyed him, he simply has refused to die.

"Ovando" essentially explains that the colonists were able to enslave the Arawaks and Caribs because initially these people were trusting and peaceful, and only interested in helping their fellow human beings. But the story also reveals the inability of the colonists to destroy the culture that existed in the Caribbean before the Europeans arrived, because after four hundred years, Ovando is dying and cannot be resuscitated, but his victims are learning how to live again despite the reality that they have been stripped of their personal power and dignity. In "Ovando," Kincaid becomes a kind of historian, rewriting the history of her homeland, a history that has been manipulated by the very colonists who invaded the Caribbean. She emerges as a teacher, reminding her readers that to control another human being will always result in the loss of our own humanity, and eventually our lives.

Kincaid has noted that she is not finished exploring the relationship between Ovando and the narrator, but that she needs more time to research the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized before she can finally complete the story and feel as if she has said everything that needs to be voiced (Ferguson 159). Originally, Kincaid's fiction spoke of the effects of colonization on an individual, like Annie or Lucy, but now Kincaid has concerned herself with discovering how large groups of people were exploited, and how one goes about trying to undo the damage, or at the least, copes with the exploitation and moves on.

After writing "Ovando," Kincaid continued to publish similar short stories and essays until beginning one of her current projects focused on
gardening, and in particular the cultivation of flowers. In 1992 these articles started appearing in *The New Yorker*, and Kincaid has since expressed her desire to eventually compile all of the essays into a book. An avid gardener, Kincaid said that she only decided to write about her garden after speaking to a friend who suggested that perhaps she had valuable advice that would benefit other gardeners (Ferguson Interview 167). And since that conversation, Kincaid has discovered that her interest in gardening is linked to her interest in exploring the history of colonialism:

> It has dawned on me that gardening is one of the original forms of conquest. I mean elemental. You conquer food. You place it in one place. Also the idea of gardening is you stay in one place so you can conquer your space. But apart from that, gardening, as we know it, almost all of the flowers out there are a result of conquest. (Ferguson Interview 167)

In her garden Kincaid has discovered that many of the plants she grows on her Vermont property are not native to America, but have instead been transported from other countries. Occasionally, the plants are not as hardy in their new environment, and so need to be protected. Most of the time, the plants that originated in warmer climates as annuals, are only perennials in Kincaid's garden. She finds that the conquest of plants is perhaps an apt metaphor for the conquest of people, who also lose some of their vitality, and some of their authenticity when they are colonized.

However, what is particularly disturbing to Kincaid with regard to flowers, is that those who wreak the conquest either destroy what they have stolen, or
claim that it belonged to them all along. In looking at the conquest of flowers, one can understand how culture can be stolen from a whole country of people:

What is incredible is how the conquered world would take identity; for instance, "Dutch tulips." What is "Dutch tulips"? It is not native to Holland. Or cocoa isn't native to the Dutch. Or tea isn't native to England. Things like that. It gives them identity. Dutch chocolate is the best chocolate, but there isn't one cocoa tree that can grow in Holland. But what is so interesting is that when people in the conquering position take things, it doesn't threaten their identity. (Ferguson Interview 168)

While Kincaid is speaking of flowers in this instance, she might just as well be discussing literature or art. For instance, the literature from Caribbean cultures has traditionally been marginalized by Western critics who do not value it because it does not adhere to the stylistic standards that traditional Western literatures exhibit. But recently, as Caribbean literature has become more popular in colleges and universities, scholars have made a move to include it in American literature classes, suggesting that it belongs to the conquerors as well.

Ultimately, in her garden essays Kincaid seems to suggest that "taking" something is not wrong. But "claiming" something that is not your own is a crime that cannot go unchecked. The European colonists traveled to the Caribbean and claimed the islands to be their own, when already there was a whole vibrant culture that already occupied the land. It seems then that to know where one comes from, to know one's place, is a notion that the colonists tried to usurp from the Antiguans, and to some extent they succeeded, stealing both their land and their identity.
Kincaid continues to write and publish essays on gardening, and has made it her pet project to identify the origins of many flowers, giving the native flora and perhaps some part of their identity back to Antigua, Haiti, Japan, India, and numerous other countries. Anywhere that she can possibly call her reader's attention to the injustices to which they may be blindly contributing, Kincaid feels that her efforts are worthwhile. She also realizes that as someone who now has the luxury to garden, as someone who through wealth and popularity has become part of the conquering class, she must be particularly careful in how she uses her power, and must remember the powerless who struggled before her and continue to struggle (Simmons 21).

Currently, Kincaid is expected to release a book of fiction titled An Autobiography of My Mother. Already the novel is a year behind publication schedule, and Kincaid has been somewhat secretive over when the book will be completed, as well as its content. However, she has suggested that it is the first book she has written that is actually fiction and not modeled after her personal life (Simmons 23). After interviewing Kincaid, Diane Simmons concluded that the book would detail the experiences of a Carib Indian, born in Antigua at the end of the Twentieth century. Kincaid's grandmother, who was a Carib Indian, might be the source of her inspiration (23). At any rate, the title of the novel suggests that Kincaid is still intent on representing the experiences of her ancestors, as well as studying the relationship between the colonists and the colonized.

Since the publication of Annie John, Kincaid's voice has changed as her political consciousness has evolved. In Annie John she began to understand the power relationship between the colonists and the colonized through her
relationship with her mother. Today she tries to help both her own people and her white readers to identify and reject the power relationships in their worlds, be it in government institutions or in the garden. Kincaid seems to insist that only then will we obtain peace and equality among all people.

Jamaica Kincaid began her writing career by trying to understand her alternately happy and unhappy childhood on a small island in the Caribbean. She has since come to America and discovered a truth that will perhaps help all of us take responsibility for this very large and conflicted world.
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