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Writing Self, Narrating History:
Textual Politics in Jamaica Kincaid’s Novels

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Abstract

In this thesis, I attempt to examine Jamaica Kincaid’s re-negotiation with the politics of power relations in her novels. Kincaid’s novels, through the strategic deployment of autobiographical writing, redress the power dimension in the notions of self and history. The fact that Kincaid frames the field of power relations within the thematic recurrence of mother-daughter relations structures her novels in a way that conflates her personal stories with her group history. Moreover, such a structure emphatically registers the self-positioning act of Kincaid’s writing as a strategy for survival. The first chapter explores how Kincaid mobilizes her self-writing as an act of political resistance. On the one hand, Kincaid opposes her writing which is delivered in the name of herself or her culture to the poststructuralist pronouncements of the general demise of a writing subject. On the other hand, Kincaid, through implicating the poststructuralist fracture of self in the protocol of decolonization, attempts to strategically inhabit in what Homi Bhabha calls the in-between space to define herself. The second chapter deals with the inscription of historical forces on the body. Foucault’s genealogical unpacking of history in the body here helps to investigate how Kincaid’s fictional alter egos bear and, more importantly, act out against the inscription of power. The third chapter focuses on the politics of Kincaid’s autobiographical writing. At first, I unpack the relations between history and the politics of women’s writing in the West Indies, and borrow the poststructuralist interrogation of Western historical knowledge to contradict the West’s epistemological claims to West Indian history. And then I turn to the analysis of Kincaid’s autobiographical writing, which, through its thematic deployment of mother-daughter relations, turns on the political empowerment in her strategic integration of her personal and collective history.
Introduction

*Writing Self, Narrating History: Textual Politics in Jamaica Kincaid’s Novels* is a thesis that examines the textual politics of Jamaica Kincaid’s writing. This thesis comprises three individual but interlocking chapters that explore a complex set of interrelated issues such as writing and the continuous negotiation of post-colonial subjectivity; subversive bodily acts as the resistance to the inscription of historical forces; the double reference of the past in Jamaica Kincaid’s autobiographical stories. It aims to investigate how Kincaid strategically maps, re-maps, and then textualizes the operations of power relations to challenge the workings of colonization. If I were asked to summarize the sustaining argumentative thrust of this thesis—that is, what this thesis as a whole is about, I would like to propose the rubric of “de-scribing empire” as a response.

I derive this notion of “de-scribing empire” from a collection of essays edited by Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson, *Describing Empire: Postcolonialism and Textuality*, which was published by Routledge in 1994. In a preliminary chapter in *Describing Empire: Postcolonialism and Textuality*, provocatively entitled “Introduction: the Textuality of Empire,” Tiffin and Lawson critically examine the “textuality” of empire by exposing the correlation between colonization and the colonizer’s textual control over the colonized. They argue that the interpellation of the colonized by the textual fabric of colonial domination becomes central to the material maintenance of established power relations: “imperial relations may have been established initially by guns, guile and disease, but they were maintained in their interpellative phase largely by textuality” (3). At the same time, Tiffin and Lawson also emphatically map out the possible textual trajectories of resistance against colonial domination. It is no wonder that they assert: “[j]ust as fire can be fought with fire, textual control can be fought with textuality” (10).
Born in Antigua in 1949, Jamaica Kincaid, christened Elaine Potter Richardson, grew up under British colonial domination and emigrated to U. S. at the age of seventeen, very like the protagonists of most of her novels. Haunted by a history of slavery and colonialism, Jamaica Kincaid expresses her angst and anger in her attempt to confront “history.”

What to call the thing that happened to me and all who look like me?

Should I call it history? If so, what should history mean to someone like me? Should it be an idea, should it be an open wound and each breath I take in and expel healing and opening the wound again and again, over and over, or is it a monument that began in 1492 and has come to no end yet? Is it a collection of facts, all true and precise details, and, if so, when I come across these true and precise details, what should I do, how should I feel, where should I place myself? Why should I be obsessed with all these questions? (“In History” 1)

For Kincaid, obviously, “history” has been a question rather than a certainty. Kincaid’s speculation on “history” grounds her contradictory act of resistance to and reclamation of the past. As a writer living in and with the aftermath of “history,” she juxtaposes her personal story with a collective one to articulate an autobiography that is at once hers and theirs, one that speaks from the elsewhere of pain and anger and demands an attentive hearing.

And the prominence of power relations, in Kincaid’s novels, serves as an agent of textual instability. As a matter of fact, Kincaid’s novels frame the textual deployment of power relations in her autobiographical mother-daughter relations. Through writing her personal stories against the fabric of empire, Kincaid attempts to redress the permeation of textual relations by power. As Kincaid observes her own writing in an interview: “in figuring out the relationship between the girl and her
mother . . . I must have consciously viewed my personal relationship as a sort of prototype of the larger, social relationship that I witnessed” (Birbalsingh 144).

Moreover, it is important to note that the ambivalent relations between the mother and the daughter in Kincaid’s novels account for the ambiguous relations between the powerful and the powerless in Antigua, to some extent. Her statement—“I met the world through England, and if the world wanted to meet me it would have to do so through England” (A Small Place 33)—spells out the predicament of her articulation central to her textual agenda of de-colonization. The historical landscape of Antigua has created a through-the-looking-glass world of twisted semantics in which Kincaid must alertly move and against which she should strategically function. To recapitulate, in this thesis, I attempt, from three different perspectives, to investigate how Jamaica Kincaid, through the textual deployment of her novels, strategically “de-scribes empire.”
Chapter One

Writing Self as an Act of Resistance

It was amazing that I could notice the politics the way I did, because most of those who took notice did so in some sort of world context, like the man who became prime minister. But I took notice of it in a personal way and I didn’t place it within the context of political action. I almost made a style out of it. (Donna Perry, “An Interview with Jamaica Kincaid” 497)

Asked during a 1994 interview whether or not she sees her writing as a form of political activity, Jamaica Kincaid responded that writing in itself, like the daily practices of deciding to “get out of bed and breathe,” is “an act of survival for my own being” (Ferguson, “A Lot of Memory” 171). She further suggested that “I am only politically active when I am writing if it is forbidden for me to write,” adding that “I don’t know what a political statement would be since I am always concerned with these issues”: that is, “how the powerful and the powerless relate” (ibid.).

Articulated in the (post-)colonial landscape of the West Indies, Kincaid’s statement, it seems, not merely voices a “style” of writing but also proposes a politics of style, which resists existing ideological frameworks and institutional practices. That Kincaid always concerns herself with “how the powerful and the powerless relate” brings to the foreground the operations of a system of power relations as well as the practices of her textual resistance to them. The system of power relations, in this context, refers to (neo-)colonialist and patriarchal discursive practices, which are embedded in the textual space of Kincaid’s prose and polemic, on the one hand, and also operate to act on the production and reception of her writing, on the other.

“Colonialism,” as Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson assert, “is an operation of discourse,
and as an operation of discourse it interpellates colonial subjects by incorporating them in a system of representation” (3). Hence, folded into the agenda of (neo-)colonialist and patriarchal constructions of texts, which effects a forgetting of not only the site of resistance, but also the site of textual resistance, are the discursive constructions of subject positions in the system of power relations. As an African-Caribbean woman writer in the United States, thus, Kincaid has to confront the multiple discursive constructions of her subject positions when she attempts to write against Western and androcentric (neo-)colonization as a mode of knowledge and an institutional practice.

Kenneth Ramchand’s critical phrase, “alienation within alienation” in The West Indian Novel and its Background (231), perfectly captures the ways in which the subject positions of Kincaid as a writer, in the (neo)colonial and patriarchal context, are constructed. The (neo)colonialist and patriarchal enterprises valorize the colonizer over the colonized. Their effacement of Caribbean people’s agency and subjectivity, which works to continually effect and reinforce the subjection of the colonized to the colonized through textual practices, further deprives Caribbean writers of their subject positions to articulate themselves. Deprived of the authorship and its subjective agency, Caribbean writers are asked to face an enforced silence and, as an unfortunate consequence, are inserted into a system of alienating signifying practices. As with the Western colonization of Caribbean writers, which results in their alienation from themselves, the effacement of women writers from androcentric Caribbean literature goes on in this similar vein. Given such a context, the double colonization of the subject positions of Kincaid as a writer, in turn, intensifies her determination to reclaim a subject position from which to articulate herself and to write herself into being. In Kincaid’s words, “[f]or me it is a matter of saving my life. I don’t know what I would do if I didn’t write. It is a matter of living in the
deepest way” (Ferguson, “A Lot of Memory” 169).

In effect, Kincaid’s emphasis on the reclaiming the subjectivity of her writing self runs counter to the poststructuralist de-emphasis of the writing subject. The poststructuralist pronouncements of the death of the writing subject, which originates with Roland Barthes and results in varying intensities of dissent among critics, challenge the authority of the writing subject as the origin and source of the text in the humanist model. In his landmark article, “The Death of the Author,” Roland Barthes powerfully contends that the author can not claim the absolute authority over his writing because writing in itself substitutes language for the author who has been regarded to be its owner in humanist criticism. According to Barthes, “[w]riting is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing” (1129). Barthes argues against the omnipresence and omnipotence of the authorial intention which exist “to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing” and instead champions the utmost importance of the reader in the writing because “a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination” (ibid.).

In a similar but differently inflected voice, Michel Foucault, in his essay “What is an Author?,” goes further to point out the possible consequent valorization of “a transcendental anonymity” (104) on the part of these unreflective critical practices when he deconstructs the site of the author as a Derridean center of writing, the site where writing originates but also remains outside it. Foucault observes that “giving writing a primal status seems to be a way of retranslating, in transcendental terms, both the theological affirmation of its sacred character and the critical affirmation of its creative character” (ibid.). Assuming that the author is the product of discourse, that is, “a variable and complex function of discourse” (118), Foucault concludes that the author should be understood in relation to the social-historical discursive
formation that proves influential upon his writing.

In the case of Caribbean writers, however, the assertion of the death of a writing subject and its consequent valorization of anonymous writing is not unproblematic. The chimera of the death of a writing subject does not necessarily work for Caribbean writers and it may even prematurely foreclose the access to subjectivity for them because the colonized has not had the similar historical relations to institutional locations that the colonizer has had. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese in her examination of the subjectivity of black women writers gives telling insights into the difficulties that Kincaid might encounter in the pursuit of her subjectivity:

The death of the subject and of the author may accurately reflect the perceived crisis of Western culture and the bottomless anxieties of its most privileged subjects—the white male authors who presumed to define it. Those subjects and those authors may, as it were, be dying. But it remains to be demonstrated that their deaths constitute the collective or generic deaths of the subject and author. There remain plenty of subjects and authors who, never having had much opportunity to write in their own names or the names of their kind, much less in the name of the culture as a whole, are eager to seize the abandoned podium; it has merely insisted that the podium cannot be claimed in the name of any particular experience. And it has been busily trying to convince the world that intellectual excellence requires depersonalization and abstraction. The virtuosity, born of centuries of privileges, with which these ghosts of authors make their case, demands that others, who have something else to say, meet the ghosts’ standards of pyrotechnics. (67; italics mine)

Surely it is obvious that the seeming demise of the author through the spectre of
“transcendental anonymity” still haunts the texts of minority writers as “the transcendental signified” (280) which, ironically, Derrida attempts to deconstruct.

Given that it excludes the problem of subjectivity crucial to minority writers, it seems, the poststructuralist agenda of de-centering the author centers upon the author again. In other words, the agenda in itself tends to hinder an adequate assessment of subjectivity of the non-white, non-male authors, by measuring it against the so-called impersonal and abstract conception of the white, male author’s demise, while celebrating the same monolith of anonymous writing instead. For the non-white, non-male authors, to seize the podium to articulate “in their own names or the names of their kind,” or “in the name of the culture as a whole,” turns out to be an imperative and urgent task. This is especially true for Kincaid, who herself faces the exigencies not merely of her personal survival, but also of recasting a “tradition of incredible cruelty and suffering and injustice—not to mention murder, complete erasing of whole groups of people” (Perry 502) that is imposed on her and people like her as a whole. It is without surprise, therefore, that Kincaid presses for the articulation of the idea and feeling of her own and her kind. As she would have it earlier in the same interview: “the important thing is to say that I think we feel—people like me must feel—and I don’t want to speak for everyone, but I wouldn’t be surprised if people in my position—you know, color, sex—just feel it’s urgent” (Ferguson, “A Lot of Memory” 167).

This brings us to investigate the problematic of subjectivity in the self-positioning act of Kincaid’ s writing as textual resistance. Giovanna Covi, in addressing the discursive formations of both patriarchy and (neo)colonialism, maps out the emergence of a “prismatic” self in Kincaid’ s writing:

subjectivity emerges when ideologically preconstituted identities, on the basis of such parameters as gender, race, nationality and
class, interrupt one another to confront their respective biases and enforce their various powers with reference to a specific political agenda.  (37-8; italics mine)

Covi’s observation makes problematic whatever “subjectivity” that is implicit in Kincaid’s “specific political agenda.” Through defining it as the conflicting product of multi-dimensional determinants, at once sexual, racial, national, classified, Covi conceptualizes subjectivity in Kincaid’s writing as not merely constituted by but also constitutive of multiple positions. Asserting its constructed-ness is not to diminish its force upon “subjectivity.” Quite the reverse. Emphasizing the constructed-ness of “identities” drives home the process through which “subjectivity” is forged. It can be argued at this point that the articulation of poststructuralism within this post-colonialist “specific political agenda” is both enabling and problematic.

The poststructuralist interrogation of Western humanism and its politics of representation helps to dismantle the objective truth and impersonal knowledge produced as the result of the humanist articulation of self as a neutral, stable, autonomous, homogeneous and unified center. Louis Althusssser critically demonstrates how individuals are “interpellated” as free “subjects” in “ideologies,” which constructs “the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live” (242), for instance. And Michel Foucault in his analysis of the objectification of the subject also cautions that the individuals who inhabit a “kind of political ‘double bind,’ which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures” (“The Subject and Power” 424), occupy sites of double discursive formations. The nonessentialist arguments of poststructuralism against Western humanism helpfully implicate self in the protocols of de-colonization, fracturing the humanist conceptualization of self in the name of multiple identities and
diasporic subject positions. What is more, the poststructuralist critical drive to disrupt the dichotomous mode of dominant narrative—albeit grounded upon the crisis of Western cultural authority—also proves influential upon the dislocation of the center-margin division that subtends the colonial relations in the so-called First and Third Worlds. The reduction of the diversity and heterogeneity of the world into the either-or extremes “between self and non-self, truth and falsity, sense and nonsense, reason and madness, central and marginal, surface and depth” structures what Terry Eagleton calls “a way of seeing typical of ideologies” (115). And the political representation of the colonizer and colonized, as well as the First and Third World opposition, goes to the very source of the problem, which is binarity itself. Hence, Covi’s conceptualization of “subjectivity” in Kincaid’s writing, rising from the combative site of “ideologically preconstituted identities” rather than the promise of the recuperation of authentic identities, never parrots but undermines the pattern of binaries fundamental to Western thought.

It is in this context that I would like to read and evaluate the engendering of “subjectivity” in Kincaid’s novels Annie John and Lucy. Here we have a black-Antiguan American woman writer in diasporic locations whose political commitment to the de-colonization of Antigua routes itself via the fictional construction of her personal identities. Given the politics of the personal, that is, the de-colonization of her subject, Kincaid’s novels support a possible understanding of her self-writing as “a political activity.” Kincaid in her writing moves away from the field of the so-called First and Third Worlds as always divided in the same way around the poles of the colonizer and the colonized. She emphatically points out in an interview: “[a]s I go on writing, I feel less and less interested in the approval of the First World, and I never had the approval of the world I came from, so now I don’t know where I am. I’ve exiled myself yet again” (Perry 506). Since Kincaid feels
doubly exiled, feeling a flimsy sense of belonging to both the place she comes from and the place she takes residence in, it is not surprising that she feels stranded “in-between” cultural and geographical spaces. Through her female protagonists’ journeys in the “‘in-between’ spaces” (Bhabha 1) that make up the historical setting of the (post-)colonial West Indies, Kincaid attempts to define her fictional alter egos against dominant ideological frameworks and institutional practices. This is because, according to Homi Bhabha, the “‘in-between’ spaces” provide border people with “the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the society” (2). Thus, in Kincaid’s novels, the import of the female protagonists’ journeys is never the end point of her destination but the point of departure of her identities-in-process, the on-going contestation of her identities over race, gender, class and territorial nationality in its social contexts.

**Annie John**

Let me turn now by way of illustration to Kincaid’s novel, *Annie John*, a coming-of-age narrative that charts the journey of the title character from a child of ten to the age of puberty, from the enclosed realm of a familial home into the sophisticated, worldly space of an adult society, from her home island Antigua finally into England. Like Kincaid’s other novels, all of which structure around the relations of a daughter to a mother, this coming-of-age narrative also turns on the tension between Annie John and her mother when Annie John struggles to define herself against her mother. But Kincaid in *Annie John* demonstrates this mother-daughter tension through playing off the development of the black female protagonist against the conventions of the coming-of-age narrative. For Kincaid,
Annie John’s growing up female and black in colonial Antigua complicates the process of her confrontation with her mother.

I would like to analyze Kincaid’s *Annie John* as a narrative that plays off the engendering of female black-Antiguan subjectivity against the generic conventions and assumptions of the *Bildungsroman*. This is because the coming-of-age form that Kincaid’s *Annie John* takes to show the identities-in-process of her female black-Antiguan protagonist in (post-)colonial Antigua mobilizes the formal properties of the *Bildungsroman* that cater to the development of the male, white, European subjectivity. In her critical essay entitled “Decolonizing Genre: Jamaica Kincaid and the *Bildungsroman*,” Maria Helena Lima begins with her genre criticism of the traditional male *Bildungsroman* and moves on to point out the political implications of its generic conventions and assumptions. According to Maria Helena Lima, “genres, however, like languages, function like prisms in a mirror which impose their own shape on the reality they attempt to describe, the novel form itself may limit the kinds of subjectivity that can be constituted within its generic boundaries” (433). In other words, the formal properties of the traditional male *Bildungsroman* genre could be understood as the institutional matrix against which the engendering of subjectivity should be measured because it shapes an individual self-development in a social context. Instead of conforming to the generic form that integrates an individual self-development into the existing ideological framework, however, the feminist *Bildungsroman* contests “its generic boundaries” when it attempts to construct female subjectivity. Rita Felski goes even further to contend that “the feminist text, however, reveals a rather different trajectory; the journey into society does not signify a surrender of ideals and a recognition of limitations, but rather constitutes the precondition for oppositional activity and engagement” (137).

Set against (post-)colonial Antigua, Kincaid’s *Annie John* complicates the
process of contesting female black-Antiguan subjectivity, although it is possible to argue that the feminist critical approach inspires a new preoccupation with the problematic of the Bildungsroman genre in the context of gender politics. As a matter of fact, Maria Helena Lima, in “Decolonizing Genre: Jamaica Kincaid and the Bildungsroman,” provides a critical vocabulary well suited for approaching such a (post-)colonial feminist Bildungsroman as Annie John. As she argues, “[r]egions which have undergone European colonization constitute particularly interesting sites to observe what I call generic transculturation since different cultures will transform the ‘originary’ genre to serve their particular needs” (433; italics mine). Lima’s conceptualization of generic transformation as “generic transculturation” has critical political dimensions here. On the one hand, it undoes the canonical generic assumptions and categories by relating their transformation to their different contexts. On the other, it dismantles the intercourse of different cultures to produce the heterogeneous ensemble of a generic miscegenation for a cultural-specific purpose.

In light of the cultural-specific purpose of “generic transculturation,” the bildungsroman in Kincaid’s Annie John can be understood as a trope of appropriation, a kind of textual resistance, on the part of a (post-)colonial Antiguan woman writer, to construct black-Antiguan female subjectivity, since it proves “how ’the Empire writes back to the Centre’” (432). Lima clearly points out:

Post-colonial writers have used the Bildungsroman as a way of inventing fictions in order to understand/ explain/ constitute themselves, to explore precisely the complexities and contradictions of growing up in a region where (post)colonial and racial relationships exacerbate an already oppressive patriarchal situation. Since post-colonial writing is grounded in the cultural realities of those societies whose subjectivity has been constituted at least in part by the subordinating power of
European colonialism... tracing resistance to such construction

becomes central to a post-colonial feminist reconceptualization of the

Bildungsroman. (440)

Read from “teleological,” “biographical,” “historical,” and “dialectical” perspectives, which Rita Felski offers to construe the Bildungsroman (Beyond Feminist Aesthetics 135), Lima’s words here indubitably encapsulate the problematic of the postcolonial feminist Bildungsroman. The postcolonial feminist writers appropriate the Bildungsroman genre for their “teleological” purchase with “the complexities and contradictions” of their postcolonial female protagonists’ self-development. They invent the “biographical” process of their self-development to “understand/ explain/ constitute themselves.” Apart from that, they ground this process in “cultural realities of those societies” that subtend the “historical” landscape of power relations, since the “(post)colonial and racial relationships” complicate the “dialectical” process of the postcolonial feminist writers in “an already oppressive patriarchal situation.” Lima’s conceptualization of the postcolonial feminist Bildungsroman as “generic transculturation” sheds light on the politics of power relations Kincaid’s Annie John implicates. And the politics of the postcolonial feminist Bildungsroman further provides the groundwork for the engendering of Annie’s black-Antiguan female subjectivity in “the in-between spaces” when we attempt to sketch the process of her self-development.

Kincaid’s Annie John begins with an account of the circumstance in which the title character Annie John sets out on her journey for the exploration of, first, death, and then, sex in the first two chapters. These two linked opening sequences begin the process of Annie’s self-development. They turn on the thematic mother-daughter tensions, on the one hand, and challenge the generic conventions and assumptions of the Bildungsroman, on the other. Her family’s temporary journey from their home in
St. John’s to the house in the outskirts of the town allows her access to the sight of “the black and white sticklike figures” of the mourners in “the distance” that she later recognizes as the funerals in the cemetery there. The fact that the death of a child has always been buried in the morning strikes Annie with alarm, cautioning her to the inevitability and unpredictability of her own death: “Until then, I had not known that children died” (Annie John 4). In the later scene that describes the death of a daughter of her mother’s friend, a bony, red-haired girl younger than her, Annie further acquires a stronger sense of the threatening force of death. Her mother’s acts of stroking the dead girl’s forehead, bathing and dressing the dead girl, and finally putting her in the coffin make her feel repulsive toward her mother. In her own words, “[f]or a while, though not for very long, I could not bear to have my mother caress me or touch my food or help me with my bath. I especially couldn’t bear the sight of her hands lying still in her lap” (6).

Her mother’s initial closeness with the dead girl and her later active participation in burying the dead girl adumbrate that Annie’s closeness with her mother would come to an end. With the burgeoning rebelliousness of her puberty, Annie dares to defy her mother. For example, Annie’s profound sense of curiosity about dead men has been increased ever since she caught sight of the funerals in the cemetery. Her returning home late from visiting the funeral of the humpbacked girl turns on the mother-daughter tension when she fabricates the pretext of having not picked up the fish from Mr. Earl, but, when her mother perceives the falsity of her excuse, she gets punished by her mother, instead. As a consequence, “[t]hat night, as a punishment, I ate my supper outside, alone, under breadfruit tree, and my mother said that she would not be kissing me good night later, but when I climbed into bed she came and kissed me anyway” (12). The looming of the growing strain in her mother-daughter relations, together with the unspeakable sense of her anxiety over the
death of a child, that is, the end of her childhood, constitutes the episodes that initiate her into a painful process of self-development.

The same situation can be found in Annie’s encounter with sex, which turns on her mother-daughter tensions when she is ushered into the recognition of gender limitations with her physical/sexual maturation. The mother-daughter relations change as Annie reaches the age of puberty. As a child, Annie shows her adoration for her mother when she is apprenticed by her mother about how to deal with domestic chores in her school-holiday routines: “how important I felt to be with my mother” (15). Consider, for example, two telling scenes in which Annie develops and reinforces her intimacy with her mother; first, the scene in which the mother and the daughter take bath together. And, second, the wooden trunk scene in which Annie’s mother reviews the toys and items in a wooden trunk with her, while recapitulating the stories that are associated with these things of endearment. It is important to note, at this juncture, that both the protective ritual of bathing and the stories of the wooden trunk have matrilineal dimensions. The bakes that Annie and her mother take together not merely show their intimacy and closeness but also protect them from the harm of the evil spirits that women her father had had children with have evoked through the Obeah. The wooden trunk that her mother carried with when she left home but now contains the mementos of her childhood nurtures their intimacy and closeness. Besides, that Annie’s mother tells the story about Annie again and again helps Annie to define herself. Annie describes this experience as extremely pleasant: “when she did this with the trunk, it was a tremendous pleasure . . . as she held each thing in her hand she would tell me a story about myself” (21). It is no wonder that when embraced by her mother’s love, she exclaims: “it was in such a paradise that I lived” (25).

The dramatic turn occurs, when her legs become “spindelike,” her hair more
“unruly,” and her perspiration “strange” (ibid.). Annie and her mother are no longer bathed in a maternal bliss and their relation enters into a new phase. In the scene that Annie’s mother considers Annie no longer appropriate to wear dresses made up the same cloth of her mother’s, for Annie can not go around her life “look[ing] like a little me [her mother],” Annie feels “bitterness and hatred” (26). For Annie, her mother’s refusal to wear the dress made of the same clothing of hers makes her hope to “cut back on my [her] growing” (27) in order to maintain their intimacy and closeness. However, Annie’s acts of defying the “young-lady business” and “piano lessons” that her mother arranges to make a young lady of her ironically exacerbate her anxiety, for she is frequently alarmed by “the corners of her mother’s mouth turned down in disapproval of” her and her mother’s back “turned on me in disgust” (28), in return.

The growing strain in her mother-daughter relations culminates in her emergent awareness of her mother’s sexuality, which seems to be deliberately exhibited in front of her to puncture her intimacy and closeness with her mother. In her own words, “[t]hough I couldn’t remember our eyes having met, I was quite sure that she had seen me in the bedroom, and I didn’t know what I would say if she mentioned it” (31). Just as her reaction against her mother’s participation in burying the bony, red-hair girl, “I then began to look at my mother’s hands differently” (6), so Annie responds to her mother with the same open hostility. As she says, “I was sure I could never let those hands touch me again; I was sure I could never let her kiss me again” (32). The hands of Annie’s mother run through the scenes of death and sex. For Annie, the hands of her mother that once builds a paradise in which she is loved with overwhelming passion and adoration plunges her into the post-lapsarian morass of “bitterness and hatred.” For Annie, the role of her mother turns out to be that of subjugating her to the (post-)colonial male-dominated world, to make a young lady of
her. Keith E. Byerman, in her “Anger in a Small Place: Jamaica Kincaid’s Cultural Critique of Antigua” points out,

the Caribbean woman when she offers a critique, must do so from within the cultural assumptions and language of the colonizers, filtered through the mother. Thus the aesthetics of anger take shape as a dialectic of cultural affirmation and denial: Kincaid attacks society and the culture while acknowledging the power of the mother(land) over her novelistic voice” (92)

As she traces the journey of Annie toward her adolescence, Kincaid fleshes out Annie’s ambivalence toward her mother. The Janus-faced attitude that Annie John assumes toward her mother embodies her ambivalence when she struggles to define herself against her mother. It can be argued, thus, that the contrast between Gwen and the red girl epitomizes the two-facedness of Annie, her ambivalence toward her mother. Gwen represents the perfect image of goodness and neatness that Annie’s mother expects to make of her. As Annie describes Gwen, “the pleats in the tunic of her uniform were in place, as was to be expected. Her cotton socks fit neatly around her ankles, and her shoes shone from just being polished” (47). On the contrary, the red girl represents the exact image of badness and dirtiness that her mother works with efforts to prevent Annie from becoming. Interestingly, however, the fault of the red girl becomes, in Annie’s mother’s eyes, the failure of the red girl’s mother’s: “such a nice woman, to keep that girl so dirty” (57). But for Annie, the red girl stands against gender limitations she encounters along with the process of her physical/sexual maturation: taking a bath only once a week, rarely combing her hair, climbing trees for fruit, and playing marbles with the Skerritt boys. While her mother sees in the red girl sloppiness, Annie sees her as the epitome of absolute freedom, especially the kind of freedom one can find only in heaven. As she
says, “Oh, what an angel she was, and what a heaven she lived in” (58). For Annie, Gwen and the red girl occupy the two poles of a spectrum in which she hopes to negotiate her own way to define herself against her mother.

In the process of her self-development, Annie’s struggle to define herself against her mother is displaced onto first her unspeakable sense of unhappiness and then her mysterious illness, and finally her departure for England. In contrast to the traditional Bildungsroman, which integrates an individual self-development into an existing ideological framework, Kincaid fleshes out the conflict between Annie and her mother rather than her resigned acceptance of her mother. Annie describes her unhappiness: “[m]y unhappiness was something deep inside me, and when I closed my eyes I could even see it. It sat somewhere—maybe in my belly, maybe in my heart; I could not exactly tell . . .” (85). In fact, Annie’s description of her “unhappiness” as something “I could not exactly tell” (ibid.) can be seen as the prelude to her description of mother-daughter tensions as “something I could not name” (88). The scene of a doting mother and an adoring daughter in front of other people (including her father) is juxtaposed with the scene of their doing battle with each other in private. In Annie’s own words, “[m]y mother and I each soon grew two faces: one for my father and the rest of the world, and one for us when we found ourselves alone with each other” (87). The Janus-faced attitudes that Annie and her mother assume toward each other and other people (including her father) account for the growing strain in the mother-daughter tensions: “my mother would kill me if she got the chance. I would kill my mother if I had the courage” (89).

Annie’s unhappiness not only takes physical form as “something” sitting on her, crushing her from within, but also culminates in disabling her physically as she succumbs to a mysterious disease. Annie’s mysterious disease sums up her confrontation with her mother in the process of her self-development as she looks
inside herself: “I look inside my head. A black thing was lying down there, and it shutting out all my memory of the things that had happened to me” (111-2). The obeah woman, Ma Chess, Annie’s grandmother, helps her to recover her health through the ritualistic repertoires of the mother-daughter intimacy and closeness. Ma Chess provides a womb-like space for healing Annie’s disease. Annie describes:

Ma Chess settled in on the floor at the foot of my bed . . . I grew to count on her smells and the sound her breath made as it went in and out of her body . . . Ma Chess would come into my bed with me and stay until I was myself . . . I would lie on my side, curled up like a little comma, and Ma Chess would lie next to me, curled up like a bigger comma, into which I fit. (126)

After that, Kincaid fleshes out Annie’s departure for England not merely as her separation from her parents and her past, but also as the starting point of a journey she embarks for self-independence and self-definition, at the end of the story. In contrast to the traditional Bildungsroman that ends with the integration of the male protagonist into the dominant framework and institutional practices, Kincaid’s fictional alter ego Annie has to continue contesting institutional interpellations filtered through her mother’s alternating love and threat in order to define herself.

Lucy

Having the experience of a self-imposed exile, Kincaid, as an African-Caribbean immigrant in U. S. A., makes a strong case for immigrant’s dilemma of assimilation and exclusion while simultaneously problematicizing an identity politics inscribed by borders. This inscription of borders leads to the articulation of an identity politics with multi-dimensional determinants of contestation—race, gender, territorial nationality, etc. Kincaid’s *Lucy* serves an
exact exemplar of the identities-in-process, in which the politics of race, gender, and location are played off against one another in shaping the subjectivity of the title character, Lucy. In *Lucy*, we have the title character in diasporic locations, whose keen aspiration for “making a new beginning” (133) and “inventing self” (134) routes itself via Bhabha’s “‘in-between’ spaces,” that is, the borders in between postcolonial Antigua and the neo-colonialist United States. Lucy acquires a strong sense of (dis)location after she arrives in U.S.A. Immediately upon her arrival, she realizes that “I was no longer in a tropical zone, and this realization now entered my life like a flow of water . . . creating two blanks, one of which was my past . . . the other my future . . .” (5-6). For a diasporic female protagonist, Lucy Josephine Potter, as for an Africa-Antiguan American woman writer, Jamaica Kincaid, these “spaces” of in-betweenness that lend themselves to the articulation of a diasporic politics registers the geopolitical and psycho-social-historical dislocations and displacements of identities.

Kincaid’s *Lucy* portrays the invention of identities-in-process of a nineteen-year-old post-Antiguan girl Lucy in New York, from her leaving her homeland with “the mantle of a servant” around her shoulders to her arriving at a white bourgeois family, from the haunting group history of slavery and colonialism to her personal past of self-independence. Lucy comes to America because she wants to escape her mother; more importantly, she wants to invent her self. While this departure from her mother and the motherland she represents launches off Lucy’s struggle to invent herself, her departure from the white middle-class family concludes Lucy’s au pair narrative. The parallel acts of departure, first from her mother and then from her white mistress, are symbolic acts of bidding farewell to the past that delimits her potentialities. Lucy believes that only by cutting the umbilical cord that ties her with her past can she begin her life anew, even though she is not at all sure
what or who she is to become.

It is without surprise, thus, that Lucy at the very beginning of the final chapter emphatically asserts that “[b]ut in one year of being away from home, the girl had gone out of existence. The person I had become I did not know very well” (133). Lucy’s enigmatic assertion, however, prompts some provocative questions. What does this “being away from home” mean in this context, and what is it intended to achieve? What kind of power relations is “the girl” implicated in and positioned by? How could “the girl” be “out of existence” after her one-year departure from home? And in what ways does Lucy seek to assert her own experience and invent herself? Why does Lucy assert that she could not recognize the person who she has become?

The problematic of postcolonial exile—the journey from “the peripheral” to “the metropolitan” center—is complexly implicated in the politics of location and the problematic of representation. To begin my inquiry, I would like to concentrate on Lucy’s lengthy comments on Paul Gaugin after Mariah took her to see the exhibition of Paul Gaugin’s paintings at the museum. Lucy’s provocative speculation raises a number of issues significant for our understanding of the desires of postcolonial exile such as Lucy herself.

It was Mariah who had taken me there; she had wanted me to see some paintings by a man, a French man, who had gone halfway across the world to live and had painted pictures of the people he found living there. He had been a banker living a comfortable life with his wife and children, but that did not make him happy; eventually he left them and went to the opposite part of the world, where he was happier. I don’t know if Mariah meant me to, but immediately I identified with the yearnings of this man; I understood finding the place you are born in an unbearable prison and wanting something completely different from
what you are familiar with, knowing it represents a haven. . . . Of course
his life could be found in the pages of a book; I had just begun to notice
that the lives of men always are. He was shown to be a man rebelling
against an established order he had found corrupt; and even though he
was doomed to defeat—he died an early death—he had the perfume of
the hero about him. I was not a man; I was a young woman from the
fringes of the world, and when I left my home I had wrapped around my
shoulders the mantle of a servant. (95; italics mine)

There are several important things worth looking at in this scene. Lucy’s immediate
and intense identification with “the yearnings of this man” is understandably
predicated upon their similar journey from the birthplace to a foreign country. But
Lucy’s identification with Gauguin falls shorts, not only because she is a poor au pair
from the “peripheral” to the “center,” not the only way around, but also, more
importantly, it’s because she is a woman. After departing from his birthplace, where
he used to be “a banker” and had a “comfortable” life with his family, Paul Gauguin
felt “happier” in “the opposite part of the world” and represented in his paintings
people living there.

Silhouetted against Gauguin’s journey from “the metropolitan” to “the
peripheral” are the journeys of Christopher Columbus, the Western colonizers not too
long after, and curious tourists of late to the West Indies. Furthermore, Gauguin’s
very act of painting the people living over there in his own pictures harks back to the
acts of possessing its others and “incorporating them in a system of representation”
(Tiffin and Lawson 3) central to the (neo)colonialist agenda. For Kincaid,
Christopher Columbus, in his attempt to possess the West Indies and the people living
there, names the islands he “discovered” in 1493 as the New World. Given that it
“had a substantial existence, physical and spiritual” (Kincaid, “In History”1), however,
the so-called New World that Columbus is said to discover in his journey should not be understood as “the blankness of the newly made, the newly born” (2). Rather, it is “the blankness of paradise” that Columbus met because “paradise emerges from chaos, and this chaos is not history; it is not a legitimate order of things” (2). It can be argued, in other words, that Columbus’ assertion of discovering the so-called New World, for Kincaid, is the result of the invention of a narrative that works to fetishize the West Indies and the people living there. As a matter of fact, not only does Columbus turn his adventure into a journey of discovering the New World, but he also translates his colonialist impulse into an act of God by naming the West Indies as the “paradise.” “It would not have been paradise for the people living there; they would have had the ordinary dreariness of living anywhere day after day,” as Kincaid argues, “the ordinary dreariness of just being alive. But someone else’s ordinary dreariness is another person’s epiphany” (ibid.).

No less problematic are also the journeys taken by both British colonizers and Euro-American tourists to an incompatible milieu. Kincaid’s critical analysis of Antigua in the first two parts of her A Small Place points out all sorts of ironies in both the British business of empire building and the Euro-American tourism. The irony of ironies is that “there they were, strangers in someone else’s home, and then they refused to talk to their hosts or have anything human, anything intimate, to do with them” (27). The journeys taken by the British colonizers to Antigua in the name of grasping “the meaning of the Age of Enlightenment” (36), namely, practicing the civilizing mission, cause “the destruction of people and land that came from that” (24), in effect. There are a lot of ironic instances to substantiate Kincaid’s observation. They include their streets named after English criminals, their abusive language prohibited as lawbreaking, the inhuman medical treatment of their illness, the commodification of them as human capital, and, worst of all, the elevation of
England into the filter of Antigua.

For Kincaid, the journeys taken by British colonizers who take pleasure in “not acting like a human being” (28) in Antigua are no less than the very acts of expropriating, exploiting, and oppressing Antiguans, therefore. In the case of the Euro-American tourism, this is also what is happening in the picture. Kincaid’s caustic caricature of the tourist as “an ugly, empty thing, a stupid thing, a piece of rubbish pausing here and there to gaze at this and taste that” (17) needs to be taken as an indictment of the tourist who becomes a continuum of the colonizer. The tourist’s careless words—“I had fun when I was there” (Lucy 65)—demonstrate how the tourist, faced with his complicity with the history and power relations of Antigua, defines the absurdity his journey. By further accusing Euro-American tourists of “leav[ing] your own banality and boredom” and “turn[ing] their [Antiguans’] own banality and boredom into a source of pleasure for your[self]” (A Small Place 19), Kincaid indicts the Euro-American tourists as the very residue and extension of the colonial enterprise in the form of economic triumph of Euro-American powers over Antigua.

The French painter Paul Gaugin’s journey verges upon the same colonial desire that turns “the opposite part of the world” into exotica and capitalizes upon the other world as his creative inspiration and artistic self-definition. To paraphrase it further, Paul Gaugin’s act of journeying away from his homeland to “the opposite part of the world” suggestively parallels the act of the European expansion into and exploitation of the “other” world. Paul Gaugin’s quest for himself in his journey out to somewhere primitive and exotic further echoes the Western quest for self in the prototypal journey some benevolent colonialists took in a presumably cleansing attempt to shed themselves of all “trappings of privilege and so-called civilization to encounter the honesty of ‘barbarism’” (Boehmer 126). It is always through
(re-)ascribing “the opposite part of the world” as the “other” world, (re-)relegating the other world as barbarism, and (re-) fetishizing barbarism as the authentic other that Western civilization can reauthorize the historically and culturally dominant white self in its self-questioning.

A case in point is “the crisis of European authority” that the agenda of post-modernism turns on. “The crisis of European authority,” the term Helen Tiffin borrows from Craig Owens to designate the process through which post-modernism turns on, redeems and reforms the self through appropriating the other again, in fact. At the beginning of her critical article upon the re-casting of postcolonial history, “Post-Colonialism, Post-Modernism—Rehabilitation of Post-Colonial History,” Tiffin cautions us against the “labeling” of the postcolonial agenda as “post-modem” because of the “cultural relativity” that the agendas of both post-colonialism and post-modernism center upon (170). The “potential relativisation of its epistemology and ontology,” as Tiffin contends, “acts through such labeling once again to make the rest of the world a peripheral term in Europe’s self-questioning” (171). Thus Gaugin’s journey away from his home can not be exactly paralleled to Lucy’s although for Mariah, it is not entirely dissimilar. For Lucy, her home island might be “the other part of the world” that Gaugin explores as the exotic other to practice his self-definition. The practice of the self-other relation, especially in terms of man-woman relation has the same consequence for her. Lucy notes that “his life could be found in the pages of a book . . . he was shown to be a man rebelling against an established order he had found corrupt.” In contrast to Paul Gaugin, who is conceived as “a man rebelling against an established order he had found corrupt,” Lucy is devoid of “the perfume of the hero” due to her gender. It is this understanding of her journey as “a young woman from the fringes of the world” with “the mantle of a servant” around her shoulders that no sooner does Lucy identify with
Paul’s thirst than she shows her awareness of their radical difference.

The moment, when Lucy recognizes her yearnings to make of her home island “an unbearable prison” and the United States “a haven,” the reality seems to suggest the opposite. In fact, no sooner does Lucy arrive in New York, on her first night, than she becomes disillusioned with what she has envisaged in her daydream. Lucy at the beginning of the first chapter “Poor Visitor” disappointedly asserts:

In a daydream I used to have, all these places were points of happiness to me; all these places were lifeboats to my small drowning soul, for I would imagine myself entering and leaving them, and just that—entering and leaving over and over again—would see me through a bad feeling I did not have a name for. I only knew it felt a little like sadness but heavier than that. Now that I saw these places, they looked ordinary, dirty, worn down by so many people entering and leaving them in real life, and it occurred to me that I could not be the only person in the world for whom they were a fixture of fantasy. It was not my first bout with the disappointment of reality and it would not be my last. (Lucy 5; italics mine)

It turns out that, although the metropolitan scenes in her daydream—a famous building, an important street, a park and a spectacular bridge—are a comfort to her, the daydream world is very different from the real world Lucy encounters in New York. Indeed, the imaginary metropolitan scenes that she used to enter and leave in her daydream—“lifeboats to my small drowning soul”—turns out to be an ironic version of the mundane realities of life in which most people must enter and leave. Lucy’s claim that this would not be the last time she suffers “the disappointment of reality” corresponds to what Kincaid writes in an essay: “the space between the idea
of something and its reality is always wide and deep and dark” (“On Seeing England for the First Time” 37). What is more, it serves to foreshadow what Lucy would continue to encounter in New York City. And, a little farther on in this passage, when she twists in a taxi to have a good view of the metropolitan landscape, the new undergarment that Lucy wears punctures at this point as if to remind her of the discomfort of the newness of the new world. “I was reminded of how uncomfortable the new can make you feel” (Lucy 4), Lucy so speculates and her speculation adumbrates how Lucy would position herself in the metropolitan landscape of New York City.

At this point, New York City stands in Lucy as the metropolitan center in contrast to which the West Indies is relegated to being its marginal other. Lucy arrives in New York City to serve as an au pair working for a white bourgeois family. The white middle-class family has the critical advantage of providing a context in which Lucy would position herself against the metropolitan cityscape in which she, as a female black-Antiguan colonial subject, should be kept in her place. In this white bourgeois family, the metropolitan constructions of the binary opposition between the norm and its marginal other, might be observed in its most vivid forms. “This binary form of representation,” contends Stuart Hall, is employed to frame those “people who are in any way significantly different from the majority” into both ways. Stuart Hall in “The Spectacle of the ‘Other’” asserts:

They seem to be represented through sharply opposed, polarized, binary extremes—good/ bad, civilized/ primitive, ugly/ excessively attractive, repelling-because-different/ compelling-because-strange-and-exotic.

And they are often required to be both things at the same time. (28)

In effect, it is this framing of those who are “‘them’ rather than ‘us’” (ibid.) that accounts for the white family’s dominant discourses which alternatively fear and
fetishize its other. Lucy’s position is doubly awkward for she is symbolically excluded from the white family but physically a part of it. The designation of Lucy as a “poor visitor” in the context of a metropolitan center is an exemplar of such a “binary form of representation.”

For a short while, Lucy indulges in the white bourgeois’s hearth and home. But she experiences a change of mood when the white master of the household Lewis finds out her strange look at their table manners.

They said I seemed not to be a part of things, as if I didn’t live in their house with them, as if they weren’t like a family to me, as if I were just passing through, just saying one long Hallo!, and soon would be saying a quick Goodbye! So Long! It was very nice! For look at the way I stared at them as they ate, Lewis said. Had I never seen anyone put a forkful of French-cut green beans in his mouth before? (Lucy 13-14)

For the white bourgeois family, Lucy is never one of their family members all the while, but rather one of the visitors, who go to see them and spend time with them. However, it is not as simple as that. The white bourgeois’s designation of Lucy as a poor visitor takes on specific meaning in our understanding the power dimension in their relations. And the question that Lewis poses further evinces what Stuart Hall terms the “having-it-both-ways” in the politics of representing difference (“The Spectacle of the ‘Other’” 229), since Lewis’s question renders Lucy innocent and ridiculous.

“This having-it-both-ways is important because, as I hope to show you, people who are in any way significantly different from the majority—‘them’ rather than ‘us’—are frequently exposed to this binary form of representation” (“The Spectacle of the ‘Other’” 229). Hall’s words encapsulate how difference has been represented as other-ness. Hall, in addressing the work of representation as signifying practices,
unpacks the power in the field of representation. For Hall, the representation of
difference, which grounds its production of meaning in a binary form, clearly makes
explicit the politics of representation, since it must designate the other to valorize the
one in accord with the dominant discourse.

The following story that Lewis tells further associates Lucy with the primitive
native and relegates her to the category of the subhuman. Similar to Lewis’s uncle,
who “found actual human beings hard to take” (14) after raising monkeys for years in
Canada, Lucy is rendered as a “poor visitor’ in the New York family after leaving her
home island. Lucy notes that “[t]hey said I seemed not to be a part of things, as if I
didn’t live in their house with them, as if they weren’t like a family to me, as if I were
just passing through, just saying one long Hallo!, and soon would be saying a quick
Goodbye” (13). However, after Lewis tells his racially offensive story, Lucy shares
a dream she had with the family:

Lewis was chasing me around the house. I wasn’t wearing any clothes.
The ground on which I was running was yellow, as if it had been paved
with cornmeal. Lewis was chasing me around and around the house,
and though he came close he could never catch up with me. Mariah
stood at the open windows saying, Catch her, Lewis, catch her.
Eventually I fell down a hole, at the bottom of which were some silver
And blue snakes. (14)

As Lewis’s representation of Lucy is displaced onto his storytelling, Lucy’s
dream, enigmatic as it is, is further interpreted from a western frame of mind,
understood as a rendition of Lucy’s unconscious desire for her white master. Lucy’s
dream is evoked here to unfold the historical moments of the colonial rule when the
British empire exerts its power upon Antigua, a primal scene conflated with a scene in
the metropolitan center where the white middle-class family similarly exerts its
discursive power over Lucy. Juxtaposing this dream scene with the historical scene of the colonialists’ violation of the land from which Lucy comes, we can then ascertain that the white middle-class family and Lucy’s confrontations thus have additional political dimensions. The family that Lucy serves is of European descent and they might therefore be complicit with the ravages of slavery and colonialism. Without knowing the historical implications of colonial relations in Lucy’s dream, it is not surprising, therefore, that Lewis and Mariah respond to Lucy’s dream vision, first with silence and then with such remarks as “Poor, poor Visitor” and “Dr. Freud for Visitor” (15). Lewis and Mariah’s silence indicates their astonishment; Lewis and Mariah’s resort to Freudian psychoanalysis to interpret Lucy’s dream demonstrates their indebtedness to a cultural legacy which they readily deploy to rationalize Lucy within their grasp. Their interpretative strategy, in turn, situates themselves in a complicated network of colonial relations. Moira Ferguson argues:

Lucy is simultaneously fetishized and condescended to in a revamped form of old hierarchical relations existing between the colonizer and the colonized as her employers and their friends try to homogenize difference and subsume it within their jurisdiction. (“Lucy and the Mark of the Colonizer” 239)

Thus the confrontations between the white middle-class family and Lucy are intertwined with the conflicts between the colonizer and the colonized. Through displacing the historical moments of colonial relations onto the metropolitan circumstances of their confrontations, Kincaid fleshes out Lucy’s struggle to position herself against the white middle-class family’s dominant discourses.

In other scenes that focus mainly upon the confrontations between the white mistress Mariah and the black-Antiguan au pair Lucy, Kincaid positions Lucy’s struggle against the white middle-class family’s dominant discourses in terms of
mother-daughter tensions. As Lucy asserts: “[t]he times that I loved Mariah it was because she reminded me of my mother. The times that I did not love Mariah it was because she reminded me of my mother” (Lucy 58). Kincaid has Lucy draw the parallel between Mariah and her biological mother. And the ambivalent attitudes that Lucy embraces toward her surrogate mother Mariah are mixed with her ambivalence toward her biological mother. It is important to note that Lucy’s self-exiled journey from her home island to the United States revolves around her struggle to define herself against her mother.

The crucial scene in the last part of the chapter “Cold Heart” spells out her disappointments and her resentment, both of which reinforce her resolution to separate herself from her mother. Lucy’s parents’ hilarious celebration of her newly born brothers, together with their high expectation of her brothers’ accomplishments in the future, is a striking contrast to their indifference to the ability and potential of their only girl Lucy. For Lucy,

My father did not know me at all; I did not expect him to imagine a life for me filled with excitement and triumph. But my mother knew me well, as well as she knew herself: I, at the time, even thought of us as identical; and whenever I saw her eyes fill up with tears at the thought of how proud she would be at some deed her sons had accomplished, I felt a sword go through my heart, for there was no accompanying scenario in which she saw me, her only identical offspring, in a remotely similar situation. To myself I then began to call her Mr. Judas, and I began to plan a separation from her that even then I suspected would never be complete. (Lucy 130-131, italics mine)

It especially breaks Lucy’s heart that even her mother, the maternal figures which she identifies with, can not stand up for her only daughter, “her only identical offspring.”
despite their closeness. It is obvious that while the closeness of a daughter to a mother nourishes Lucy’s strong commitment to identifying with her mother, her mother has no such strong attachment to Lucy. The fact that Lucy names her mother “Ms. Judas” is a speech act serving to indict her mother for her betray of their once intimate mother-daughter relationship. Furthermore, her mother’s unquestioning adoption of the maternal position of biological and ideological amounts to the endorsement of the authority of dominant ideological frameworks and institutional practices. As a consequence, in Lucy’s eyes, her mother not merely “had betrayed herself,” but also “had betrayed me [Lucy] also” (Lucy 127). In a letter, which serves to spell her final break with her mother, Lucy makes a list of betrayals she has suffered at the hands of her mother. Lucy complains that while her mother acts as if she were “a saint,” Lucy actually needs “just a mother” because she is “living in this real world” (ibid.). Thus the awareness of betrayals is the starting point in Lucy’s search for her own self-independence and self-identification; that is, to carve out her own territory. And Lucy’s self-exiled journey acts out her disobedience to her mother, her resistance against the social landscape of post-colonial Antigua. As Kincaid notes in an interview: “how unusual it is in the West Indies, the idea of carving out one’s own territory. I don’t really notice it being done; one lives very much the life of one’s parents” (Cudjoe 228).

Lucy seemingly harbors a decidedly unbending belief that she could possibly separate herself from her mother once the geographical distance from her home island is distant enough. Consider, for example, Lucy’s immediate response when she receives her first letter from her mother:

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

Lucy’s very acts of distancing herself from her home island by separating the events she encounters in New York City from the events relating to her home island might lend itself to the cutting of this umbilical cord from her mother. However, the language that Lucy uses to articulate—beginning with a conditional cause “if” and ending with a speculative question “would I not be”—reveals her unspeakable sense of ambivalence toward her mother. As a matter of fact, “this separation in space,” as Lucy speculates when she begins to chart the course of her life, “would never be complete.” Her emotional responses to the subsequent letters from her mother might spell out her ambivalence toward her mother. As she says, “I thought of opening the letters, not to read them but to burn them at the four corners and send them back to her unread . . . but I could not trust myself to go too near them. I knew that if I read only one, I would die from longing for her” (Lucy 91). Furthermore, Lucy’s claim that she hopes to be able to freely take what she encounters “just as it came” rather than cautiously invest it with historical implications, in turn, discloses her desire not to measure what she encounters in New York City against the historical landscape of her home island Antigua. Coupled with this distancing herself from her home island, this turning to the historical implications of every signifying practice—“hundreds of years in every gesture, every word spoken, every face”—enables Lucy to negotiate her way out the limbo of mother-daughter complex, first against her mother and, then against Mariah.

As I have mentioned earlier, Mariah and Lucy’s confrontations parallel those of Lucy’s relations to her mother. For Lucy, Mariah and her mother share the same
desire to make her see the world in their way and both expect to make an exact replica of her. Consider, for example, the train journey that Mariah plans for the family to spend time in the family house on the shore of one of the Great Lakes when the spring season begins. Without announcing to Lucy her real intention, Mariah kindheartedly arranges a surprise occasion during which Lucy is to be stunned, as she has always been stunned, by the beauty of daffodils. Through her sequential acts of blindfolding Lucy, leading Lucy by her hand, and walking Lucy into the garden, Mariah forces Lucy to see daffodils from her own sentimental eyes and attempts to make Lucy see them in the way she does: “‘[t]hese are daffodils. I’m sorry about the poem, but I’m hoping you’ll find them lovely all the same’” (29). Obviously, Mariah turns a blind eye to Lucy’s prior explanation of the intricate relation between daffodils and her experience of colonial rule in her home island. That is to say, the Janus-faced attitude she has to maintain when she is required to memorize and recite the “Daffodils” poem by William Wordsworth in front of the public and Lucy’s subsequent nightmare in which daffodils return to chase her down. Lucy recollects her deep-seated animosity toward daffodils: “I wanted to kill them. I wished that I had an enormous scythe; I would just walk down the path, dragging it alongside me, and I would cut these flowers down at the place where they emerge from the ground” (29). Through recasting daffodils in “a scene of conquered and conquests” (30), Lucy further demonstrates her awareness of the radical difference between Mariah and her. As she says, “[t]his woman who hardly knew me loved me, and she wanted me to love this thing . . . that she loved also . . . but nothing could change the fact that where she saw beautiful flowers I saw sorrow and bitterness” (30). After all, Lucy does not have the same relations to history that Mariah does.

Throughout the novel, the power relations of colonialism serve as the haunting shadow of the power dimension in the white bourgeois family’s relations to Lucy, as a
matter of fact. And because the power relations between the white bourgeois family and Lucy are defined in colonialist terms and sometimes translated directly into colonialism, American culture no doubt becomes another name for colonialism’s cultural legacy Lucy has to contest. Lucy’s resistance against daffodils makes a strong case for the colonialist power in the structuring of her relations to the white mistress Mariah. Mariah enjoys daffodils in full bloom as the most amazing thing about the nature and expresses her hope that Lucy would like them. Daffodils in bloom, from the perspective of cultural difference, are not simply a spectacle of nature, but an institutional effect of discourse, that is, the interpellative function of colonialist education. The scenario in which Lucy has to memorize and recite William Wordsworth’s poem “Daffodils” to the public at Queen Victoria Girls’ school clearly makes explicit how colonialism turns on inscription, on the absorption of Lucy’s black female body as a literal text into a writing. As Lucy describes, “everybody stood up and applauded with an enthusiasm . . . told me how nicely I had pronounced every word, how I had placed just the right amount of special emphasis in places where that was needed . . .” (18).

Lucy again re-articulates her sense of their radical difference in the scene where Mariah and Lucy have dinner in the train on their way to the family house in the Great Lakes. Lucy contends that those who wait on diners are not her relatives because “they only looked like them,” says Lucy, “[m]y relatives always gave backchat” (32) although the diners and those who wait on them in the dining car do bear some superficial resemblance to the relatives of Mariah and Lucy at first sight, especially in terms of skin colors. It should be noted, however, that, for Lucy, the hierarchical relation of the masters to the servants in the dining car no doubt parallels that of Mariah in relation to Lucy. And that her relatives always talk back to their masters echoes her resistance to Mariah’s condescending benevolence to her. In the family’s
house around the Great Lakes, where Mariah spent her childhood, Mariah holds out her hope that her children and Lucy, “all of us,” should see things over there in “the way she did,” and enjoy the house “as she had done as a child” (36). This reminds Lucy that while she has come to the New World to escape her mother’s suffocating control, and the burden of her mother’s love, she ends up, rather ironically, finding herself with another mother figure who desires to make her see the world in the way she did. Thus the episode reinforces Lucy’s resolution that she would rather die than become another version of her mother. To do so, she has to leave again, this time, from Mariah so that she can truly find and define herself: “[b]ut I already had a mother who loved me . . . I had come to feel that my mother’s love for me was solely to make me into an echo of her; and I didn’t know why, but I felt that I would rather be dead than become just an echo of someone” (ibid.).

Thus it can be argued that Lucy pursues a trajectory of self-definition that is oppositional and contestatory in her self-exiled journey: from her home island Antigua to the United States, from the white bourgeois household to the apartment with a roof over her head. Through her self-exiled journey out from her home island to the United States, Lucy attempts to define herself against her mother and the dominant ideological framework and institutional practices her mother endorses in the social landscape of (post-)colonial Antigua. However, it is obvious enough that Lucy’s self-exiled journey not merely makes her face up with what the colonial history of her home island has made of her, but also plunges herself further into an encounter with other neo-colonial power relations in the metropolitan center of New York. Grounded in the context of gender politics, Kristen Mahlis’s critical analysis of Lucy’s self-exiled journey sheds light upon the oppositional and contestatory trajectory that Lucy pursues. In her essay “Gender and Exile: Jamaica Kincaid’s Lucy,” Mahlis draws on Gillain Rose’s conception of “paradoxical space” to
demonstrate “the paradoxical space of the female exile” in Kincaid’s *Lucy*. This is because Lucy pursues in her self-exiled journey the trajectory of her self-definition in “the position of being both prisoner and exile, both within and without” (qtd. in Mahlis 165). According to Mahlis, “the paradoxical space of the female exile” registers the space “shaped by the complex interaction between the female body and masculinist cultural imperatives” (165).

In one sense, “the paradoxical space of the female exile” that Mahlis demonstrates in Kincaid’s *Lucy* could be understood as Homi Bhabha’s “‘in-between’” space because it negotiates “a space of intervention” (1) for Lucy to contestate and collaborate her identities in the male-dominated world. More importantly, Lucy’s self-exiled journey undermines the misconception of exile as “an erasure of or an escape from one’s past history and past self” (Mahlis 167) in her male counterparts. Kincaid claims her words in an interview: “[e]verybody is always looking for a way out. And what was their way out? The New World. Start Fresh. But of course you can’t. There’s no such thing as a fresh start” (Perry 502).

This explains why Lucy in the final chapter claims her self-invention by following her “intuition” and asserts her self-invention in relation to her “memory,” her “anger,” and her “despair”:

I understood that I was inventing myself, and that I was doing this

more in the way of *a painter* than in the way of a scientist. I could

not count on precision and calculation; I could only count on *intuition*. I did not have anything exactly in mind, but when the picture was complete I would know. I did not have *position*, I did not have money at my disposal. *I had memory, I had anger, I had despair.* (*Lucy* 136)

For Lucy, only when she comes to terms with what the colonial history of her home island made of her can she invent herself although her past might flood her with the
sensation of anger and despair. Only when she invents herself by following her intuition like a painter can she keep her identities-in-process rather than indulging in the scientific regulation of her identity as an essence.

In conclusion, I would like to quote Stuart Hall to sum up my argument about the engendering of subjectivity in Kincaid’s *Annie John* and *Lucy*. As he asserts in “Cultural Identity and Disapora”:

> Cultural identities are points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning. Hence, there is always a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental ‘law of origin.’ (113)

The dynamics of cultural identity that conceptualizes “hybridity” serves to shatter all attempts to freeze it into a simple, closed context of essentialist duality attendant on the cult of “authenticity.” The recuperative tactic of authenticity that the colonized uses as a tactic of resistance slides uncritically into the reductive mode of duality endorsed by the colonizer. The reductive mode of either/or thinking—the recuperation of an original absolute—has easily led to a naïve oversimplification of the colonial encounter. As Gareth Griffiths in “The Myth of Authenticity” points out, “the mythologizing of the authentic . . . in many ways itself a construction which overpowers one of the most powerful weapons within the arsenal of the subaltern subject.” Namely, “that of displacement, disruption, ambivalence, or mimicry—discursive features founded not in the closed and limited construction of a pure authentic sign,” continues he, “but in endless and excessive transformation of the subject positions possible within the hybridized” (76). However, in *Annie John* and *Lucy*, we have the title characters inhabiting the “in-between spaces,” negotiating a space to define themselves. For Annie John, to grow up in post-colonial Antigua
involves her in the confluence and tension of two cultures. Her rebellion against the family restrictions and her final departure for England register her identities-in-process. For Lucy, to locate her subjectivity in the dislocation of cultural difference necessitates the self-affirmative mode of thinking and writing. Other than trapping herself in the political limitation of oppositional forms of thinking, Lucy renders herself in an open-ended, inclusive yet cultural-specific way. Assuming as an artist at the end of the story, Lucy demonstrates her identities-in-process in an intuitive rather than calculated way: “I did not have anything exactly in mind, but when the picture was complete I would know” (Lucy 134).
Chapter Two

The Politics of History and Body Inscription

Kincaid writes herself into her novels, and renders her self-writing an act of resistance. Kincaid’s novels become the site in which she struggles to historically position herself against the ideological framework and institutional practices of slavery and (neo-) colonialism. And the body in Kincaid’s novels presents the embodied self and offers the site for the marking of power relations. More importantly, Kincaid’s rendering of corporeal images of her fictional alter egos often imports the extent to which historical forces inscribe themselves onto corporeal bodies. At the same time, it emphatically fleshes out the possibilities of resistance against the historically specific inscription of power relations. Consider, for example, the physical/sexual maturation and the mysterious illness in Annie John (Annie’s struggle and her mysterious sickness); the marking of difference in Lucy (Lucy’s cultural encounter); the pursuit of sensual experience without love (Lucy’s disavowal of the male cult of chastity in Lucy and Xuela’s affairs with married men and her refusal to embrace her loveless nation by resorting to abortion in The Autobiography of My Mother). As a matter of fact, all these bodily struggles register the inscription of power on the body, the complex matrix of power relations that discursively and materially inscribe themselves on the body in an institutional regime, a specific situation, and a historical context. Kincaid’s fictional alter ego Xuela asserts in The Autobiography of My Mother:

But who can really forget the past? Not the victor, and not the
vanquished, for even when words become forbidden, there are other ways to betray memory: the unmet eyes; the waves of a hand that signifies the exact opposite of the friendly hello or the friendly goodbye . . . —this truth registers on the face, in the arrangement of the body itself. (221)

In her novels, Kincaid clearly hints at the association of history with the body. Articulated in the (neo-) colonial landscape of the West Indies, Kincaid foregrounds the inscription of historical forces on the body and the politics of power relations it implicates. The bodily struggles in Kincaid’s novels not merely register the politics of power relations, but also suggest to the significance of embodying the West Indian history. That is to say, the West Indian bodies are not merely the productive and reproductive bodies; they are also resisting bodies, uncooperative, extravagant, and signifying bodies, all of which carry a rhythm and aesthetics that resist western inscription.

The Body, History, and Power: a Foucauldian Approach

An essential section in Michel Foucault’s “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”—a critical essay unpacking traditional conception of history—foregrounds the inscription of power relations on the body as a historical text.

The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration. Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history’s destruction of the body. (83)
Foucault’s assertion clearly hints at the relations between history and the body. From his genealogical approach to traditional history come the discursive constructions of the body as a historical text, reflecting and giving material expressions to the agencies and contingencies of history. The material body turns out to be seen not as the elucidation of a stable entity grounded in universal humanness and trans-historical truth, but as the positing of the site on which the operations of power relations in a given historical context are inscribed.

Foucault’s genealogical unpacking of traditional history demonstrated in the materiality of the body offers a critical approach well suited for investigating the embodiment of the West Indian history in Kincaid’s novels, since it helpfully sheds light on the body as the text on which the politics of power relations is historically inscribed. In Kincaid’s rendering of bodily struggles as historical, we could find much the same inscriptive economy of power relations that we see in the critical theories of Foucault. Like Foucault, who addresses the body as “the inscribed surface of events,” Kincaid recognizes the inscribed remains of the past on the body: “this truth registers on the face, in the arrangement of the body itself.”

Articulated in the (neo-) colonial landscape of the West Indies, Kincaid’s obsession with the relations between the powerful and the powerless complicates Foucault’s discourse of power-knowledge and directs it toward the procedures and protocols of (neo-) colonialism, however. In a sense, it can be legitimately said that Foucault’s critical theories demonstrate the genealogical importance of the body against the historical knowledge of Europe, whereas Kincaid’s novels dismantle the conflicting bodies in the process of colonization and its residual legatees across different historical landscapes. The difference of historical determinants and subject positions between Foucault and Kincaid characterizes their articulations of different political orientation; namely, their articulations can boil down to the difference
between post-modernism and post-colonialism. Helen Tiffin’s observation, which urges us to pay vigilant attention to the correlations of these two political agenda, helpfully illustrates the critical drives of both Foucault and Kincaid. Tiffin asserts:

To question one’s own authoritative bases as European post-modernism perceives itself as doing is different from, on the one hand, opposing another full-fledged system on equal terms to that of Europe, and on the other, interrogating that authority with a view to erecting a systematic alternative to define a denied or outlawed self. (171) 

Obviously, Tiffin forestalls the identification of post-colonialism with post-modernism by distinguishing the circumstances of relational politics. By telling a marginalized other from a peripheralized self, that is to say, Tiffin attempts to underscore the political difference in post-colonial history. According to Tiffin, the marginalized other that Foucault articulates for is directed against the “authoritative bases” of Europe themselves, therefore. But, for Kincaid, to recuperate “a fully-fledged system” or to erect “a systematic alternative” seems imperative when she attempts to define the West Indies against Euro-American (neo-) colonialist enterprises.

Foucault’s genealogical unpacking of history in the traditional sense still provides the enabling ground for rehabilitating postcolonial history that Kincaid ultimately concerns herself about although Foucault never gives it the explicit attention that goes to his elucidation of effective history. Foucault’s genealogical approach to history here works out in recapturing the past on the palimpsest of the body. At the same time, it relates to the larger theoretical and critical framework of Foucault’s concern with the relations between power and knowledge. In this critical essay, what Foucault is concerned about is the very politics of historical knowledge. According to Foucault, discursively, knowledge constructs, while at the same time is
constructed to transcribe, power (relations), since both closely correlate with each other. “There is no power relations without correlative constitution of a field of knowledge,” as he elsewhere clearly points out, “nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations” (Discipline and Punish 27).

For Foucault, the knowledge of history itself is no exception: “[k]nowledge, even under the banner of history, does not depend on ‘rediscovery,’ and it emphatically excludes the ‘rediscovery of ourselves’ ” (“Nietzsche” 88). Reading back through Nietzsche’s genealogical interrogation of morals, Foucault attempts to unpack “the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies” (77) central to the politics of historical knowledge. For Foucault, traditional history pursues an ideal of a pre-temporal origin, understood as an unproblematic source, and presupposes the finality, an ultimate legitimization for its teleological orientation. Given this, Foucault adopts the genealogical approach to unpack the metaphysics of traditional history and opposes the so-called “effective history” against traditional history. In contrast to traditional history, which structures a universal schema and presents an uninterrupted continuity, Foucault’s effective history operating on a palimpsest emphasizes the uniqueness, randomness, and dynamics of the events. The events not merely disrupt the false unity, but also effect the reversal of power relations in history. As Foucault asserts: “they [the forces operating in history] do not manifest the successive forms of a primordial intention and their attraction is not that of a conclusion, for they always appear through the singular randomness of events” (88).

It is important to note that Foucault’s genealogical unpacking of history, which focuses on the rendering of Nietzsche’s “descent” and “emergence,” proves influential on the body. Foucault asserts that “[t]he body is molded by a great many distinct
regimes; it is broken by the rhythms of work, rest, and holidays; it is poisoned by food or values, through eating habits or moral laws; it constructs resistance” (87). As a matter of fact, Foucault disregards the humanist conception of the subject as autonomous and thereby rejects the significance of the material body this autonomous subject assumes. More clearly put, just as the subject autonomously exists with universal humanness and trans-historical truth in the humanist sense, so the body exists without the influence of any given social and historical moment. For Foucault, the body, as the demonstration of the material circumstances and implications of subjective construction that relates to history and the social milieu, should be understood as the site of the inscription of power relations, however. From Foucault’s genealogical analysis of historical descent in the body comes the image of the dissociated self, thus. And Foucault’s rendering of “emergence” central to his genealogical unpacking of history works further to render the inscribed body of historical forces precarious, open to change, since “emergence” as the momentary manifestation of “the hazardous play of dominations” (83) embodies the dynamics and effects of contending forces in history.

As a matter of fact, the correlation of power with the body in a given historical context constitutes a specific political economy of the body. According to Foucault, the body has been central to the mechanism of control and regulation operating through the institutional effects of discourses. Foucault studies this type of power as “the political technology of the body” and analyzes the operations of apparatuses and institutions as “a microphysics of power” (Discipline and Punish 26). Foucault’s microphysical analysis of power registers the operation of discipline on the body; and it is through this operation of disciplinary power that the body has been rendered docile. As Foucault asserts, “it [discipline] defined how one may have a hold over others’ bodies . . . they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed, and
the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, ‘docile’ bodies’ (138). Moreover, also worth noting is that Foucault’s analysis of power from below—the so-called “microphysics of power”—steers the locus of the operation of power from such sovereign and centralized forms as the authorities to the multiple and concrete manifestations in the everyday practices of power relations. And the body occupies the most specific stage in which the microphysics of power can be observed. Thus, it is no wonder that Foucault rejects the simplification of discipline as “an institution” and “an apparatus.” Instead, he conceptualizes discipline as “a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a ‘physics’ or an ‘anatomy’ of power, a technology” (215).

At the same time, such conceptualization of (disciplinary) power in turn produces the multiplicity of possible resistance inherent in the body, since as Foucault argues “where there is power, there is resistance” (The History of Sexuality: An Introduction 95). What Foucault’s genealogical unpacking of history in the body attempts to foreground is the rendering of the body not merely as the very site of the inscription of power, but also as the site of resistance. As the inscribed site of historical forces, which “manifests the stigmata of past experience and also gives rise to desires, failings, and errors” (“Nietzsche” 83), the body no doubt becomes the site of protest in which the politics of power relations implicates.

The Embodiment of West Indian History

In a similar but somewhat inflected voice, Kincaid, in her novels, foregrounds the politics of historical forces inflicted on the people of the West Indies. In “Jamaica Kincaid and the Modernist Project: An Interview,” Kincaid stringently asserts that “I can never believe that the history of the West Indies happened the way
it did,” and goes on to argue that “the truth about it is that it erased actual groups of people—groups of people vanished, just vanished” (Cudjoe 223-24). In a sense, Kincaid’s imprecation against and suspicion of European colonialist history accords with Foucault’s genealogical investigation of European historical knowledge. Like Foucault’s genealogical approach to history, which “operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments”, the documents that “have been scratched over and recopied many times” (“Nietzsche” 76), Kincaid attempts to challenge the single, linear, and paradigmatic narrative of Western Indian history. This act of renegotiating the received past, which works to restore the residual traces and possible ramifications of the past, is of great importance. Renato Constantino in “Notes on Historical Writing for the Third World” observes:

A people’s history must rediscover the past in order to make it reusable. . . Such a history can then serve as a guide to present and succeeding generations in the continuing struggle for change. . . The past should not be the object of mere contemplation if the present is to be meaningful. For if the past were viewed as a “frozen reality” it would either dominate and immobilize the present or to be discarded as irrelevant to today’s concerns. (234)

Constantino cautions against the valorization of the past as ‘a frozen reality’ and emphasizes the close relations of the past with the present and the future. The recasting of the past as flexible, which correspondingly renders the present significant, opens up the possibilities for “the continuing struggle for change.” Since “the tragedy of the colonized everywhere is his alienation from his past” (233), to render the past usable in order to make sense of and change the present indubitably becomes imperative.

Constantino’s rendering of the past flexible so that it can be useful for the
present accords with the Foucauldian project of writing history of the present operative in Kincaid’s novels. In her *A Small Place*, Kincaid satirically indicts Antiguans who “reveal themselves to be like children being shown the secrets of a magic trick” in the face of history, for “[t]o the people in a small place, the division of Time into the Past, the Present, and the Future does not exist” (*A Small Place* 54). Kincaid’s satirical posture on the present Antigua, which registers historically precipitated and psychologically haunting disruptions of colonization as well as de-colonization into the West Indies, aims to severely castigate the alienation of Antiguans from their own history. The caricature of Antiguans who “can not see a relationship between their obsession with slavery and emancipation and their celebration of the Hotel Training School” (55) serves an example to illustrate Kincaid’s polemic appeal in her *A Small Place*. In Ferguson’s words, “[h]er polemic is a form of collective self-identification and self-actualization in which she tries to mirror Antiguans as they are and as they can be—to themselves” (*Jamaica Kincaid* 103). Antiguans no doubt land themselves in the predicament of history when they freeze Antigua, rendering Antigua a place that bears no relations with its present and its future. It is no wonder that Kincaid disavows the de-colonization of Antigua, since Antiguans are doomed to a life of servitude generation after generation when they land themselves in the history-less Antigua.

This assertion is reiterated and reaffirmed by Xuela Claudette Richardson, Kincaid’s fictional alter ego in *The Autobiography of My Mother*, who claims that “[f]or me history was not only the past; it was the past and it was also the present. I did not mind my defeat, I only minded that it had to last so long” (139). Xuela’s point is well taken. Given that the past and the present inform each other and the imbrication of both in each other constitutes the historical existence of time, Xuela’s emphasis on the past works to keep alive the present and effect possible changes. In
fact, it is through her critical articulation of the defeat as part of her historical past that Xuela brings into relief the historical reality of the West Indies. The West Indian history, as Xulea understands it, “was not a large stage filled with commemorations, bands, cheers, ribbons, medals, the sound of fine glass clinking and raised high in the air; in other words, the sound of victory” (138). The force of this assertion is, on the flip side, directed at the West Indian people who turn a blind eye to what complicates the historical reality, since as Kincaid asserts “people in Antigua do not like for you to speak truth” (Ferguson, “A Lot of Memory” 175). For Kincaid, the fulfillment that the West Indian history celebrates—“the things called history was an account of significant triumphs over significant defeats recorded by significant people who had benefited from the significant triumphs” (My Brother 95)—is ironically built on the victimization of the West Indian people themselves.

Xuela’s dismissal of history as “the sound of victory” does not mean that she submits to the past of her defeat. Rather, Xuela mobilizes her past as a potential space to recast history, although she acknowledges the absence of her agency in the past. Xuela asserts:

I am of the vanquished, I am of the defeated. The past is a fixed point, the future is open-ended; for me the future must remain capable of casting a light on the past such that in my defeat lies the seed of my great victory, in my defeat lies the beginning of my great revenge. (215-6)

Xuela’s acknowledgement of her past echoes what Kincaid has said in an interview, “I am interested in the defeated and identify with the defeated even though I don’t feel defeated myself” (Ferguson, “A Lot of Memory” 171). Moreover, Xuela’s rendering of her defeated past, in which lies her future success, echoes the theoretical implications of Foucault’s polemical points, since she disrupts the fixation of history as the end of a process of development or the culmination of events. In Foucault’s
own words, “these developments may appear as a culmination, but they are merely the current episodes in a series of subjugations” (“Nietzsche” 148). Foucault’s genealogical approach, which unpacks history as “emergence,” that is, the warfare of endless contending forces, works to foreground the dynamic mobility and contingencies of history.

Foucault’s genealogical unpacking of history also makes explicit a “complex mechanism” in the warfare of endless contending forces in the historical process. According to Foucault, since the warfare never ends with peace or law, “the successes of history” go to those who “are capable of seizing these rules,”

to replace those who had used them, to disguise themselves so as to pervert them, invert their meaning, and redirect them against those who had initially imposed them; controlling this complex mechanism, they will make it function so as to overcome the rulers through their own rules. (151)

This complex mechanism, which mobilizes the endless process of historical development, opens up the possibilities for rendering the colonizer defeated with its own colonial principles and practices. At Chapter Five of Annie John, “Columbus in Chains,” the title character’s rumination on the relations between the colonizer and the colonized and its impact on their colonial legatees demonstrates Kincaid’s awareness of these rules. Sympathizing with Ruth, the English minister’s daughter who can not answer the question about West Indian history, Annie sees Ruth as more than just the class dunce. The answer in itself—“On the third of November 1493, a Sunday morning, Christopher Columbus discovered Dominica” (75)—has already been saturated with the politics of power relations. As Annie says, “I am sure that if the tables had been turned we would have acted differently.” “I was sure if our ancestors had gone from Africa to Europe and come upon the people living there,”
continues she, “they would have taken a proper interest in the Europeans on first seeing them, and said, ‘How nice,’ and then gone home to tell their friends about it” (76). For Kincaid, history is the play of domination rather than the end of a development, since as her fictional alter ego Annie concludes her ancestors would have turned the tables on Europeans if her ancestors had been in their shoes.

“I could see how Ruth felt from looking at her face. Her ancestors had been the masters, while ours had been the slaves . . . we could look everybody in the eye, for our ancestors had done nothing wrong . . .” (76). Annie’s words here foreground the body as the very site of inscription of historical forces. The past image of the master-slave relations is being superimposed on the present image of the relations between Ruth and those who live with her, since Ruth lives with those who all the time remind her of the harm her ancestors had done. More clearly put, the haunting image of the master-slave relations, which registers a process of struggle between different power blocs, acts on and through the body in a manner that historical forces can be clearly observed. And this proves what Foucault argues: “[t]his relationship of domination is no more a ‘relationship’ than the place it occurs is a place . . . It establishes marks of its power and engraves memories on things and even within bodies” (“Nietzsche” 85).

Reclaiming the Colonized Body

The political economy of the body in the novels of Jamaica Kincaid refers to the inscription of colonialism on the body in the West Indies. In A Small Place, Kincaid stringently assaults the operation of colonialism’s power on Antiguans: “everywhere they went they turn it into England; and everybody they met they turned English” (24). At the same time, she spells out the consequences of colonization: “[b]ut no place could ever really be England, and nobody who did not look exactly
like them would ever be English, so you can imagine the destruction of people and land that came from that” (ibid.). Kincaid in her further elaboration of colonialism clearly details the institutional inscription of power-knowledge on Antiguans. As Kincaid asserts:

You love knowledge, and whenever you went you made sure to build a school, a library (yes, and in both of these places you distorted or erased my history and glorified your own) . . .

the beauty of us sitting there like communicants at an altar, taking in, again and again, the fairy tale of how we met you, you right to do the things you did, how beautiful you were, are, and always will be . . . .

(36, 42; italics mine)

Kincaid’s assertion encapsulates the binding mutuality and complicity of Foucauldian power-knowledge relations in the operation of colonialism. Here the institutionalization of knowledge in libraries and schools effects the operation of discipline in colonialism’s power over docile bodies. As a matter of fact, Kincaid’s caricature of Antiguans in a colonial library as “communicants at an altar” critically examines the hierarchical subordination of believers/ the colonized to God/ the colonizer behind the grace/ patronization of God/ the colonizer. As Kincaid elsewhere argues against the conflation of Jesus Christ as both the master and the friend in Christianity: “a master is one thing and a friend is something else altogether, something completely different; a master cannot be a friend” (The Autobiography of My Mother 134). Through dispelling the embodiment of Jesus Christ as both master and friend, Kincaid disrupts the embeddedness of hierarchical power relations in the theological and metaphysical ritual.

For Kincaid, the de-politicization and de-contextualization of the historical knowledge of colonial mission, clearly evident in their consistent efforts at recasting
colonial encounter as “the fairy tale,” indubitably downplays the operations as well as the disastrous effects of colonization on Antiguans. In fact, as Gauri Viswanathan observes, the establishment of schools and libraries “effaced the often sordid history of colonialisim expropriation, material exploitation, and class and race oppression behind European world dominance” (127). And Abdul R. JanMohamed further points out that behind the overt purpose of colonization “to ‘civilize’ the savage, to introduce him to all the benefits of Western cultures” is the covert one “to exploit the colony’s natural resources thoroughly and ruthlessly” (62). It is noteworthy that Kincaid’s caricatures of Antiguans in turn reflect the institutional effects of colonialisim discipline on their bodies, that is, the production of docile bodies, since Antiguans act as passive receivers rather than agents, uncritically “taking in again and again” the colonialisim indoctrination.

Given the history of the colonialisim inculcation of England in Antigua, the disciplinary institutions and the microphysical inscription of power, around which Foucault centers, need to be seriously taken. The production of docile bodies in a colonial context manifests the internalization of colonialisim discursive formation. As Kincaid also points out in an interview: “for us England . . . and its glory was at its most theatrical, its most oppressive. Everything seemed divine and good only if it was English” (Cudjoe 217). And what the colonialisim discursive formation features here is the very blasphemous assertion of the colonizer of superiority to the colonized. In “The Economy of the Manichean Allegory,” Abdul R. JanMohamed maps out the configuration of colonialisim’s power: “the dominant model of power-and interest-relations in all colonial societies is the manicheian opposition between the putative superiority of the European and the supposed inferiority of the native” (63). According to JanMohamed, the economy of the trope of the “manicheian allegory” refers to the dichotomous operations and inscriptions of power relations on
the bodies of the colonized in allegorical manifestations. And it is through this manichean allegorical structure that the discursive formation of colonialism transforms racial difference into “moral and even metaphysical difference.”

JanMohamed asserts:

This economy, in turn, is based on a transformation of racial difference into moral and even metaphysical difference. Though the phenomenological origins of this metonymic transformation may lie in the “neutral” perception of physical difference (skin color, physical features, and such), its allegorical extensions come to dominate every facet of imperialist mentality. (61)

Through the essentialist definition of physical difference, the economy of the manichean allegory effects a kind of transformation that Foucault would consider to result in the inscription of the discourse of power-knowledge on the body. In the manichean allegorical division between the colonizer and the colonized, the white colonizer is celebrated as good, superior, civil, intelligent, and rational, while the black colonized is denigrated as evil, inferior, savage, emotional, and sensual.

Kincaid’s indictment against the English colonizer’s association of her racial difference with her capability and intelligence would be lucid when read in conjunction with the manichean allegorical structure of power relations that JanMohamed has expounded. Kincaid actually does point out the white’s sense of superiority in *A Small Place*. In Kincaid’s own words, “you had always felt people like me cannot . . . people like me will never . . . people like me will never be able to . . . people like me will never understand . . . people like me cannot really think . . . people like me cannot be . . .” (36).
In *The Autobiography of My Mother*, Kincaid, through Xuela her fictional alter ego, interrogates the epistemological impulse of this allegorical structure to valorize the world that has been rendered manichean. In it, Kincaid asks two significant questions besetting the colonizer and the colonized:

What makes the world turn?

Who would need an answer to such a question?

A man proud of *the pale hue of his skin* cherishes it especially because he was just born that way and it gives him a special privilege in *the hierarchy of everything* . . .

And what do I ask? What is the question I can ask? I own nothing, I *am not a man*. I ask, What makes the world turn against me and all who like me? . . . When I ask this question, my voice is filled with despair. (131-32, italics mine)

These two questions ironically capture the manifestation of the allegorical manichean division: that is, the centrality of the colonizer—“what makes the world turn?” and the marginality of the colonized—“what makes the world turn against me and all who look like me?” A white man, born of the Cartesian descent, questions the world at the time “when all that he can see is securely in his grasp” (131), so that “there are many answers, each of them different” (132). In contrast, without “the luxury of an answer that will fill volumes” to her question, the critical articulation of a black woman seems to be muffled, appropriated, and gravitated toward the discursive practices of colonialism within such binary oppositions. In the manichean division between the colonizer and the colonized, a white male colonizer turns out to be justified in making the world turn against a black female colonized. This self-complacent claim and the epistemological imperative endorsing it sound certainly ironic and politically biased. Kincaid’s interrogation of this allegorical structure thus
functions to undermine the epistemological grounding of this manichean division. It is no wonder then that Kincaid argues against the epistemological meaning of the Enlightenment: “you might feel that there was more to you than that you might feel that you had understood the meaning of the Age of Enlightenment (though, as far as I can see, it had done you very little good)” (A Small Place 36). “The historical event of Enlightenment,” as Foucault observes, “didn’t make us [the Europeans] mature adults, and we have not reached that stage yet” (“What is Enlightenment?” 49).

The power relations of this allegorical structure register the racialized and sexualized relations of the colonial discursive practices between the colonizer and the colonized. It is in the light of the problematic of this allegorical structure that Kincaid attempts to effect the subversion of the manichean division between the colonizer and the colonized in her novels. In her attempts to redress the power relations of the colonialist discursive practices, Kincaid centers upon the reclaiming of the colonized body, especially the female body. Kincaid writes in The Autobiography of My Mother that “[t]he impulse to possess is alive in every heart, and some people choose vast plains, some people choose high mountains, some people choose wide seas, and some people choose husbands; I chose to possess myself” (173-4).

Kincaid’s concern here is not overtly political, but the consequences of her articulation are indeed deeply political. The possession of the female bodies in a colonial context is but another name for the political subversion of colonization. Laura Niesen de Abruna contends that “the same system of British education that erased and colonized indigenous history also attempted to erase female sexuality and to control the female body” (29). The superimposition of the discourse of the middle-class British upbringing in a colonial context doubtless registers an inscription of the double colonization upon the female bodies, implicating the female bodies in
the binding mutuality and complicity of the patriarchal and imperialist discursive practices. The story “Girl” from *At the Bottom of the River* serves as an example of making explicit the importance of this regime of power upon the female body. Articulating in the form of a quasi-monologue, in which imperatives, accusatory questions, prohibitions, and directions interweave one another, the mother discloses her intention to caution her daughter against “becoming a slut.” Kincaid writes:

> on Sundays try to walk like a lady and not like the slut you are so bent on becoming; don’t sing benna in Sunday school; you mustn’t speak to wharf-rat boys, not even to give directions . . . this is how to hem a dress when you see the hem coming down and so to prevent yourself from looking like the slut I know you are so bent on becoming . . . this is how you smile to someone you like completely . . . this is how to behave in the presence of men who don’t know you very well, and this way they won’t recognize immediately the slut I have warned you against . . . don’t squat down to play marbles—you are not a boy . . . don’t pick people’s flowers—you might catch something this is how to make a good medicine to throw away a child before it even becomes a child . . . this is how to bully a man; this is how a man bullies you . . . (3-5, italics mine)

As we have seen, the mother associates female sexuality with sluttishness. In the mother’s perception, the comportment and the bodily orientations of her daughter are considered as lascivious and lustful. It is important to note the doubleness of the normative articulation of the mother, however. In the process of disciplining her daughter, on the one hand, the mother resorts to the English bourgeois norms. And, on the other, she falls back upon the native customs. It is from the inscription of power upon the colonized female body that Kincaid attempts to account for the
sexualized relations of the colonialist discursive practices between the colonizer and the colonized.

At the first chapter of *The Autobiography of My Mother*, we can see that Kincaid, through Xuela her fictional alter ego, satirizes the inscription of power upon the female body in a colonial context: “[t]o my teachers, I am modest, which is to say, I did not seem to them to have any interest in the world of my body or anyone’s body. *This wearying demand was only one of many demands made on me simply because I was female*” (41-42, italics mine). And she proceeds to suggest instead the transgressive act of her physical resistance against discipline: “my hands had traveled up and down all over my own body in a loving caress, finally coming to the soft, moist spot between my legs, and a gasp of pleasure had escaped my lips which I would allow no one to hear” (43). As corporeal sites that register concretely patriarchal and colonialist discursive practices, female bodies and sexuality highlight the inscription of power and they also underscore the possibility of resistance to what Foucault postulates: “power, after investing itself in the body finds itself exposed to a counterattack in that same body” (*Power/Knowledge* 56). Kincaid’s conception of both the inscription of power upon female bodies and sexuality and its corresponding physical resistance also reflects itself in the conjugal/sexualized relations between Xuela and her doctor husband, Philip Bailey. Xuela holds that “I have long ago come to recognize this as perhaps an unremitting part of the way I really am and so I look for a man who could offer relief from this sensation; I did not look for a husband” (147). Through the reclaiming of her body and sexuality, Xuela attempts to redress the sexualized relations between the colonizer and the colonized, that is, between Philip and her. Thus, it is no wonder that the tensions between the colonizer and the colonized haunt the conjugal/sexualized relations between these two colonial legatees. In Xuela’s perception, the conflicting inscription of historical
forces upon Philip and her incessantly evokes the tensions between the colonizer and the colonized because, as she observes, “who can really forget the past? Not the victor, and not the vanquished . . . this truth registers on the face, in the arrangement of the body itself” (221). Compared to Xuela’s assertion of possessing her body, Philip’s obsession with the task of “rearranging the landscape” (143) and the pictures of “purposely built decay” (ibid.), along with his nostalgic trance in his English childhood, in turn suggests his deflated ego, his decadent body. Xuela asserts that “they were not hands that could invent or gain a world, they were hands that could lose a world” (146).

In Kincaid’s fiction, the racialized relations of the colonialist discursive practices between women are also charged with meanings. The crucial question that Kincaid poses in *The Autobiography of My Mother* captures the ways in which women are related to each other in a historically specific discursive context: “[w]hy do women hate each other?” (159). Kincaid’s rendering of the tensions and conflicts between women, which reflects the historically specific effect of the regimes of power upon the female body, recapitulates the embeddedness of conflicts in feminist critical practices. For from the perspective of feminism, which purports to overturn patriarchal hegemonies and make its own marks in and on history, the strategic importance of sisterhood can not be too overemphasized. The rubric of sisterhood has not drawn the darker and the lighter races of women close together, however. Instead, it results in the intensification of dissent among women of diverse histories and social locations who feel that “in doing so it ultimately robs them of their historical and political agency” (Mohanty 213). “The application of the notion of women as a homogeneous category to women in the third world,” Mohanty says, “colonizes and appropriates the pluralities of the simultaneous location of different groups of women in social class of ethnic frameworks” (ibid.) Mohanty warns
against the feminist “homogenizing” and “systematizing” of what is called “oppressed third world women,” by which she means the procrustean forcing of women into a single western feminist paradigm and the complicit replication of the manichean allegorical structure as feminism purely defines women in terms of gender oppression.

As I have suggested earlier, the manichean allegorical structure that JanMohamed defines as the colonialist discursive formation transforms racial difference into metaphysical and moral difference.

In a similar sense, western feminist discursive practices, which stereotype “oppressed third world women” as “illiterate (read, ‘ignorant’)” and “domestic (read, ‘backward’)” (214), indubitably draw hierarchical contrasts between women, with the colonizer seen as the superior and the colonized as the inferior race. “While the category of ‘oppressed woman’ is generated through an exclusive focus on gender difference ‘the oppressed third-world woman’ category has an additional attribute—the ‘third-world’ difference’!” (ibid.). The heart of the matter is that the white middle-class feminism is so used to naturalizing and universalizing its perspective as the mainstream that it can not conceive of alternatives of achieving common ground, therefore. Kincaid observes in an interview that “I think I owe a lot of my success, or whatever, to this idea of feminism, but I don’t really want to be placed in that category. I don’t mind if people put me in it, but I don’t claim to be in it” (Cudjoe 221).

Kincaid’s negative characterization of the lighter races of women is especially evident in her characterization of her fictional alter egos. In *The Autobiography of My Mother*, Xuela’s description of the English doctor’s wife Moira is emblematic of the relations she has to Moira. Xuela describes that “she was very pleased to be who she was,” and goes on to state, “by that she meant she was pleased to be of the English people, and that made sense, because it is among the first tools you need to
transgress against another human being’ (156). Xuela’s observation maps out the historically grounded impact of power upon Moira when Moira acts out both the discursive production of sexuality and the imperialist construction of race in her behaviors. As a doctor’s wife and an English middle-class lady, Moira presents herself as a subservient background figure. As evident by her skin, “waxy, ghostish, without life” (156), and by her dress, “only black or only gray or only white” (157), Moira embodies the inscription of regimes of power upon the body. To Xuela, being divorced from her own body “with no aim to it as far as I could see” (158) transforms Moira into “a combination of elaborate fabrications, a collection of externals, facial arrangements, and body parts, distortions, lies, and empty effort” (159).

Furthermore, the place where Moira lives is “full of people she could never love” (157), though, and she is still expected to behave herself: “kind, full of sympathy for others . . . decent . . . full of grace” (156). Moira’s latent hostility to the colonized is decorously hidden behind her surface normality and apparent cordiality. The physical description of Moira as snobbish, arrogant, and blind, with “a quality of something other” (158), lays bare the imbrication of the colonialist pride with the white female prude. The most striking example of this is that Moira reacts against her body with hypocritical conservatism. Kincaid writes:

she was a lady, I was a woman, and this distinction for her was important: it allowed her to believe that I would not associate the ordinary, the everyday—a bowel movement, a cry of ecstasy—with her, and a small act of cruelty was elevated to a rite of civilization.

(158-9)

This hypocritical conservatism conforms to what Foucault asserts in The History of Sexuality, as “the imperial prude” whose image “is emblazoned on our restrained, mute, and hypocritical sexuality” (3). Compared to Moira, Xuela nakedly defines
herself as a woman with “two breasts, a small opening between my legs, one womb,”
and asserts that “at that moment my self was the only thing I had that was my own”
(159). The attempt of Moira at differentiating a lady from a woman returns me to
where I have argued earlier; the rubric of sisterhood represents a blindness to such
coordinate factors as race and class which shape and even determine the relations
between women. It is no wonder that Mohanty asserts: “beyond sisterhood there are
still racism, colonialism, and imperialism” (269).

The Bodily/ Sexual Maturation

Jamaica Kincaid’s *Annie John*, which narrates the story of a black-Antiguan
young girl’s passage into adolescence, constitutes the post-colonial female
*Bildungsroman*. *Annie John*, as the post-colonial female *Bildungsroman* that
politically works out what Maria Helena Lima calls “generic transculturation” (433),
plays off the growing-up process of the title character against the material
circumstances and implications of the generic formation that ground the traditional
*Bildungsroman*, in fact. More clearly put, in *Annie John*, Kincaid opposes the
process of the bodily maturation of the title character against the cultural institution of
the white, male *Bildungsroman* and disrupts the institutional existence of the generic
conventions that effects the operation of power on the body. Through writing the
story onto the process of the bodily maturation of the title character, Kincaid makes
the material body into a signifying body that embodies conflictual meaning in the
postcolonial Antigua.

In a sense, the body works as a narrative sign in Kincaid’s *Annie John*. Peter
Brooks in *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* clearly points out the
correlation between the body and modern narratives:

Modern narratives appear to produce a semioticization of the body
which is matched by a somatization of story: a claim that the body must be a source and a locus of meanings, and that stories cannot be told without making the body a prime vehicle of narrative significations.

(xii)

Given this, it can be said that the process of the bodily maturation of the title character and the narration of the story in Kincaid’s *Annie John* not merely correlate with, but also gives meaning to each other. It is important to note that the process of the bodily maturation of Annie from childhood to adolescence becomes the site of a discursive battle for the meaning of the narrative, while simultaneously acting out the inscriptive economy of historical forces on the body in the postcolonial Antigua. And the political economy of the body in *Annie John* refers to the very operation of patriarchy and colonialism on the body.

Annie introduces herself to the reader as a ten-year-old child, growing up with the motherly love of care and nurture. The most striking of these passages occurs at the scenarios of the ritualized baths and the routine domestic tasks. The baths that Annie and her mother take together as a sort of the ritualized treatment work to protect them from being harmed by the evil spirits that those unmarried women who bear Annie’s father children evoke. “As we sat in this bath,” describes Annie, “my mother would bathe different parts of my body; then she would do the same to herself” (*Annie John* 14). Annie’s mother would not even hesitate to provide protection for Annie whenever they encounter one of those women on their way home: “she would suddenly grab me and wrap me up in her skirt and drag me along with her as if in a great hurry. I would hear an angry voice saying angry things . . .” (16-7). The scenario of the motherly love could also be found in the occasion whenever Annie and her mother clean the wooden box; Annie’s mother removes the mementos of Annie’s early childhood from the wooden box and tells Annie the stories of the
mementos. The act of Annie’s mother in treasuring the mementos in the wooden box, which carefully records the bodily change of Annie’s early childhood, displays her incredible motherly love for Annie. It is no wonder that Annie would say: “[n]o small part of my life was so unimportant that she hadn’t made a note of it, and now she would tell it to me over and over again” (22).

As the narration of the story goes on, however, we see Annie’s passionate and intellectual nature hampered by the process of her bodily maturation, or more precisely put, her sexual maturation. For instance, the moment when Annie’s mother unusually refuses to share the same clothing with Annie suggestively foreshadows Annie’s entrance into womanhood, an entrance signified by the maturation of her sexual body. “As if that were not enough, my mother informed me that I was on the verge of becoming a young lady,” says Annie, “so there were quite a few things I would have to do differently” (26). Annie feels helpless against the shift in her mother-daughter relations, and wishes to stop her bodily maturation even though she knows there would be no possibility for her to do it. As Annie who faces her own bodily change says: “[b]ut what could I do? I thought of begging my mother to ask my father if he could build for me a set of clamps into which I could screw myself at night before I went to sleep and which would surely cut back on my growing” (27).

As a matter of the fact, the operation of patriarchal and colonialist power relations has been inscribed on the process of Annie’s sexual maturation. The so-called “young-lady business” (27) that Annie’s mother arranges for Annie in order to make her into a lady-like girl registers the very political economy of the body specific to the postcolonial Antigua. The young-lady business that works to regulate the way in which Annie behaves and talks when she is with other people smacks of Victorian discipline and morals, since it effects the very operation of disciplinary power on the sexual maturation of Annie. Through a series of childish tricks, Annie
acts out her resistance against the inscription of discipline on her bodily/sexual maturation, however. Yet such tricks receive their appropriate punishment as well. Annie describes that “[t]his woman soon asked me not to come again, since I could not resist making farting-like noises each time I had to practice a curtsy, it made the other girls laugh so” (28). And Annie’s English piano teacher also drives Annie away, “since I seemed unable to resist eating from the bowl of plums she had placed on the piano for decoration” (28). Apart from that, Annie plays a “slamming-the-gate-and-quietly-creeping-back” (65) trick on her mother when she surreptitiously plays marbles with boys. On the one hand, Annie feels surprised about her talent for playing marbles. On the other, Annie opposes her act of playing marbles against her mother on purpose: “perhaps because I had to do exactly the opposite of whatever she desired of me, I now played and played at marbles in a way that I had never done anything” (61).

In a sense, it can be said that Annie foregrounds the politics of her childish tricks and plays it off against the inscription of discipline on the process of her bodily/sexual maturation. Even so, Annie still feels sad about her bodily change, although she seemingly takes pride in her resistance. Consider, for a moment, the occasion when Annie surprisingly stares at her own reflection on the window and then associates it with the portrait of the young Lucifer in the book. For Annie, the reflection of her bodily maturation—her big head with wide-open eyes, her long neck, her swelling forehead and cheeks, her black skin, and her unruly plaits—shows a caricature of Satan with coarse bodily features and live snakes as hairs. It might be said that the superimposition of the image of Satan on the bodily image of Annie shows her rebelliousness, but it does more than that. Annie asserts:

Satan was wearing a smile, but it was one of those smiles that you could see through, one of those smiles that make you know the person is just
putting up a good front. At heart, you could see, he was really lonely and miserable at the way things had turned out. I was standing there surprised at this change in myself, when all this came to mind, and suddenly I felt so sorry for myself that I was about to sit down on the sidewalk and weep, already tasting the salty bitterness of my tears.

(94-5)

Annie’s assertion clearly reveals her ambivalence toward the resistance she put up to rebel against her mother, in fact. Annie feels sad about her change, although she might take pride in defying her mother. Annie’s assertion does not mean that she would obey her mother in order to regain the motherly love. Rather, it foregrounds the authoritative power of Annie’s mother in the formation of the meaning of Annie’s bodily change, that is, the symbolic operation of the patriarchal and colonialist power.

Annie’s mysterious illness embodies the conflicts of power relations around the axes of sex and culture associated with the authoritative power of her mother. To Annie’s mother’s surprise, after examining Annie thoroughly and detecting no symptom of illness, the English Doctor Stephens diagnoses Annie as run-down. Annie’s mother makes no attempt to understand Annie, claiming that she has exhausted her double efforts to take care of Annie. But Ma Chess, an obeah woman, easily sees a connection between the motherly love and the political economy of the body in Annie’s illness rather than a pure health problem, especially after she presses Annie’s body with her fingers. Acting like a biological mother, Ma Chess takes care of Annie day and night and helps to see her through. In the process of disciplining Annie’s bodily/sexual maturation, Annie’s mother unknowingly resorts to the patriarchal and colonialist norms, although sometimes she falls back on the native rituals. Through her mysterious illness, in a sense, Annie acts out her resistance against the inscription of power relations on her bodily/sexual maturation.
The Mark of Difference

In *Lucy*, Kincaid unpacks the inscription of power relations on the body in the struggle of her fictional alter ego Lucy. *Lucy*, as an au pair narrative that describes a young West Indian girl working for a white bourgeois family in New York City, reveals the cultural and political dimensions of the female self-exiled encounter with the so-called metropolitan center. Throughout the narrative, we could see Lucy caught between her past experience of colonialism in the West Indies and her current experience with American culture represented by Mariah and her family. And the dislocation of cultural difference in *Lucy* grounds the inscription of borders on Lucy and, simultaneously, registers the hierarchical politics of difference Lucy acts out against when she re-names her black female body in order to contest its representation in the white male dominant institution and discourse.

Lucy begins her life in New York City as “a poor visitor” to the white middle-class family she works for. She is treated with kindness, but without genuine understanding. In one sense, it can be said that as a poor visitor, Lucy has been represented as the other to the white bourgeois family. The white bourgeois family’s friends also treat Lucy in the same way. And the politics of representing difference also constitutes a paradoxical doubleness, an inscription of the contradictory simultaneity of the other in its comportment and bodily features. For them, Lucy encapsulates the extreme alternative of primitiveness and strangeness in her female body, since Lewis feels repelled by and surprised at Lucy’s ignorance of proper table manners. Dinah makes Lucy into “a piece of nothing” when Mariah introduces Lucy to her: “So you are from the islands?” (56) And the occasion when Mariah’s friends and their children easily discuss their experience in “the islands” humiliates Lucy. In contrast to Lucy, who comes here to be designated as a poor visitor, these white
visitors “have fun there” (65), in the place she comes from. In the “chasing dream” scene which I discussed in Chapter One, the white mistress Mariah’s “Freudian” response to Lucy’s dream also situates Lucy in the western discourse and makes her into the other, since Mariah can not grasp the politics of cultural difference Lucy’s dream really implicates. Featuring both Lewis’s chasing the naked Lucy on the cornmeal-paved ground and Mariah’s yelling at Lewis to catch her, Lucy’s dream, on one level, reveals the power dimension in Lucy’s relations to the white male metropolitan culture, and on another, maps the haunting history of colonialism Lucy suffers from. As Moira Ferguson in “Lucy and the Mark of the Colonizer” asserts, “Lucy is simultaneously fetishized and condescended to in a revamped form of old hierarchical relations existing between the colonizer and colonized as her employers and their friends try to homogenize difference and subsume it within their jurisdiction” (239). Thus, the submerged history of antagonism between the colonizer and the colonized becomes essential to the relations between the white bourgeois family and Lucy.

Even so, we could still see Lucy act out against the inscription of power with her “two-facedness”. Lucy goes on to describe that “outside I seemed one way, inside I was another; outside false, inside true. And so I made pleasant little noises that showed both modesty and appreciation, but inside I was making a vow to erase from my mind, line by line, every word of that poem” (18). In fact, the “two-facedness” of Lucy, interestingly suggestive of the subversive act of colonial mimicry, simultaneously endorses and undercuts the authoritative power, since “its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority” (Bhabha 86). Moreover, the destabilizing of colonial discourse goes in tandem with the undoing of patriarchal discourse. The scenario of a black young girl reciting a white male verse, William Wordsworth’s “Daffodils,” parodies patriarchal
principles and practices, since her performative act of alienating identification problematizes the essentialization of sexual difference. “This illusion of an abiding gendered self,” as Judith Bulter avers, is the construction of “bodily gesture, movements, and the styles of various kinds” (140). Through her imitative, but satirical articulation, Lucy’s performance acts out against the inscription of cultural and sexual difference on her black female body.

Given this, it is no wonder that when Mariah, who acts like the colonizer to inculcate the colonized with their values, tries to make her accept daffodils as they are, Lucy takes on a more vigilant and militant posture against daffodils, although somehow she feels regretful about her reaction. Lucy asserts after she refuses Mariah’s embrace and questions her misunderstanding, “I felt sorry that I had cast her beloved daffodils in a scene she had never considered, a scene of conquered and conquest; a scene of brutes masquerading as angels and angels portrayed as brutes” (Lucy 30). The parallel image of the tension between the colonizer and the colonized surfaces in another occasion when Mariah and Lucy have their dinner together. But Lucy also acts out her resistance against Mariah when she indicates that she always talks back to Mariah. Hence Lucy describes her sense of indignation: “[t]he other people sitting down to eat dinner all looked like Mariah’s relatives; the people waiting on them all looked like mine . . . On closer observation, they are not at all like my relatives . . . My relatives always gave backchat” (33).

Lucy’s interrogation of the inscription of power on her black female body also manifests itself in her rendering of her relations to her white male counterparts. In her relations to Hugh, Dinah’s brother whom she encounters on vacation, Lucy shows her disregard for the male cult of the female chastity. Lucy asserts that “I did not care about being a virgin and had long been looking forward to the day when I could rid myself of that status, but when I saw how much it mattered to him to be the first
boy I had been with, I could not give him such a hold over me” (82-3). Besides, Lucy simultaneously maintains her relations with Roland and Paul: “[a]t the door of I planted a kiss on Paul’s mouth with an uncontrollable ardor that I actually did feel—a kiss of treachery, for I could still taste the other man in my mouth” (117).

Apart from resistance against her mother’s formation, Lucy’s relations with the white male counterparts strike a contrast to Mariah’s. Mariah, a white middle-class woman who fined aspirations and attitudes only within the norms of bourgeois respectability, has no real sense of the inscription of power on her. Brought up in the white male dominant culture, Mariah unwittingly endorses the manichean division of difference that valorizes man over woman, color white over color black, and even white female over black female. Mariah’s internalization of patriarchal and colonialist discursive formation no doubt results in her blindness and insensitivity. Consider, for example, Mariah’s reaction toward Lucy after Lucy relates her intelligent nature hampered by her gender role. Mariah gives her a book that begins with the line: “Woman? Very Simple, say the fanciers of simple formulas: she is a womb, an ovary; she is a female—this word is sufficient to define her” (312).

Mariah displaces the ontological completeness of a woman onto the reproductive instrument of a womb. The attempt of Mariah at reducing a woman into a womb doubtless reflects the effects of patriarchal and colonialist discursive formation that makes the female body docile and obedient to normative demands. As a Foucauldian definition of a productive and subjected female body, who participates in the patriarchal and colonialist discursive practices of reducing a woman into a womb, Mariah is positioned by men in the sexist construction of the female body. Given this, it is no wonder that Lucy would call into question this essentialist definition of a woman by saying: “my life could not really be explained by this thick book . . . My life was at once something more simple and more complicated than that”
Kincaid fictively renders what Foucault critically elaborates; that is, the inscription of historical forces on the body. Central to the genealogical unpacking of history in the novels of Jamaica Kincaid is thus the correlation of power with the body. This Foucauldian sort of critical interrogation, proceeding under the assumption that historical forces act on and through the body in a disruptive, discontinuous, and contestatious manner, turns the tables on established regimes of power. Taking on a historically grounded assessment of discursive relations between characters, Kincaid foregrounds the ways in which the body, as the object of political intervention, historically bears the marks, “the stigmata of past experience” (“Nietzsche” 148). Even more importantly, Kincaid demonstrates the possibilities of resistance in the body because as Foucault argues “power, after investing itself in the body finds itself exposed to a counterattack in the same body” (Power/ Knowledge 56).
Chapter Three

Making History: Writing Her Autobiographical Stories

As Nana Wilson-Tagoe in *Historical Thought and Literary Representation in West Indian Literature* observes:

Although the woman writer’s engagement with history is part of the general process of self-definition and reassessment in a postcolonial West Indies, the context of the writing presents a different order of imagination and representation since it is in the end inseparable from woman’s relation to history, culture, and political conditioning. The connection between these areas of experience and women’s literary expression constitutes the special slant that gives a distinctive quality to the female imagination. (223)

“The female sphere in women’s writing,” Wilson-Tagoe concludes, “is the site of several contestations and the fundamental source of cultural negotiation and transformation” (251). This would be the case because of the political implications that the female sphere in women’s writing carries. It is “the site of women’s individuation” where not merely “self-understanding and growth illuminate a sense of their place in the community,” but also “sexual politics is intertwined with the wider politics of history and transformation as women writers consistently deconstruct the divisions between domestic and public domains” (251).

History and the Politics of Women’s Writing in the West Indies

I do not begin with this quotation as an appeal to the paradigmatic authority of
the postcolonial West Indian women writers’ historical configurations. Rather, I would like to foreground the political significance of writing to them, in which these women writers in the postcolonial West Indies strategically engage with, negotiate, and contest to re-signify their own historical past. It can be argued at this point that Wilson-Tagoe’s insightful and critical observation seems to be grounded in the politics of postcolonial West Indian women’s writing. This is not simply because postcolonial West Indian women’s writing itself has been closely associated with the debated issues of the oppositional gender and racial politics in the postcolonial West Indies, but, more importantly, because it gets complicated by the oppositional stance of the politics of location.

Before proceeding to map out the historical configurations in Jamaica Kincaid’s writing, I would like to discuss here the attempt of Belinda Edmondson at “theorizing Caribbean feminist aesthetics,” whose attempt demonstrates the politics of women’s writing in the postcolonial West Indies. The foregrounding of such a theoretical and critical framework would shed light on the close relation of women’s writing to women’s historical situation in the postcolonial West Indies, thereby offering me the very grounds of investigating the historical configurations in Jamaica Kincaid’s autobiographical writing. Belinda Edmondson, in her Making Men, attempts to mobilize and redress the black feminist aesthetics so that it might encompass postcolonial West Indian women’s writing. On the one hand, Edmondson grounds her Caribbean feminist aesthetics in the current formulations of black and feminist writing, but, on the other hand, she professes her awareness of the proliferating difference of postcolonial West Indian women’s writing. From the outset, she clarifies her definition of black aesthetics by saying that: “what I mean by black aesthetics,” in fact, “connotes different things in different contexts” (86). By comparing the political and critical groundworks upon which black and feminist
aesthetics are built, furthermore, Edmondson argues against the indiscriminate identification of black aesthetics with feminist aesthetics, for it has resulted from taking their oppression in patriarchy as an essential point of commonality. She concludes by saying that of these two oppositional aesthetics, “the similarity, in other words, is a surface one” (92). Edmondson’s critical articulation of Caribbean feminist aesthetics emphatically registers the tension between black and feminist aesthetics rather than the collapse of one into the other.

It is also important to note that Edmondson, in the process of aestheticizing postcolonial West Indian women’s writing, both valorizes and problematizes the relations of the black female essence to women’s writing, that is, the essential properties of black women’s writing. Edmondson’s poetics is a vertical re-articulation of Rita Felski’s non-gender specific feminist poetics. In arguing against a feminist poetics, Felski valorizes the feminist public sphere and claims that a gender-specific feminist aesthetics overstates the link between the domestic sphere and women’s writing. For Felski, it is implausible and impossible to define “a necessary or privileged relationship between female gender and a particular kind of literary structure, style, or form” as a prior or a given in women’s writing. This definition of feminist aesthetics indubitably ignores “the social meanings and functions of literature in relation to women writers and readers” when it turns to the identification of all women’s writing as “an autonomous and self-contained aesthetic body” (19) against the patriarchal rules and practices. By contrast, “the feminist public space,” according to Felski, “constitutes a discursive space which defines itself in terms of a common identity; here it is the shared experience of gender-based oppression which provides the mediating factor intended to unit all participants beyond their specific difference” (164). For Edmondson, however, Felski’s definition of the feminist public space “has universalizing overtones which gloss over
difference” (94). And she believes that the main thrust of feminist aesthetics, like that of black aesthetics, “is rather to retrieve radical meanings from extant texts and construct an aesthetics out of a literary tradition spanning different eras and stylistic genres” (92). The foregoing discussion helps to pinpoint the tension in and between the feminist aesthetics and black feminist aesthetics, while preparing for the following discussion in which the distinction and affinity between black feminist discourse and Caribbean feminist discourse is clarified.

Given such a premise, Edmondson finds in African American feminist aesthetics a potential benefit for aestheticizing postcolonial West Indian women’s writing. Edmondson notes: “what separates black feminist discourse from black discourse or feminist discourse is how it arranges blackness and femaleness in terms of essences and political strategy” (97). When it comes to the construction of the specific black female essence, Caribbean feminist aesthetics, like African American feminist aesthetics, has to confront the interlocking constructions of both gender and race. To paraphrase it further, given the postcolonial context in which the hierarchical male dominance not solely genders the relations of racial difference, but also racializes those of gender difference, Caribbean feminist aesthetics have to concern itself with the de-constructions of both gender and race. In this sense, African American aesthetics provides useful and critical standpoints for “re-conceptualizing an authoritative literary space for themselves that simulates neither black masculinist nor white feminist constructions for the oppositional subject” (103) although these two discourses entice the black feminist aesthetics with the siren call of liberation and equality. This is partly because the black community’s reduction and denunciation of feminism as “a white woman’s problem or as a divisive imperialist foreign import” (101) in the name of national liberation no doubt amounts to the purposeful foreclosure and erasure of the inequality black
women have received throughout history. Moreover, white feminism ignores that feminism in itself can not be solely defined in terms of gender; in fact, race does not threaten to disrupt and dissolve the feminist community but recasts the intricate and interlacing conception of feminism instead.

It is not a surprise, therefore, that Caribbean feminist aesthetics has to articulate the paradoxical manner in which Caribbean women writers, like African American women writers, subscribe to black (masculinist) and (white) feminist aesthetics not as an absolutely viable essence but as a strategically political practice. Edmondson notes:

I submit that the project of a black feminist aesthetics inheres in its apparent paradox: to re-engender black women as women . . . as ‘natural’ women, within the black community; and to racialize black women within the feminist community and therefore to establish difference and a separate category of essence. (100)

Edmondson’s simultaneous endorsement and critique of black (masculinist) and (white) feminist aesthetics suggests that she should attempt to get around the black female essence through emphasizing its strategic rather than essentialist relations to women’s writing. In Diana Fuss’s words, “the political investments of the sign ‘essence’ are predicated on the subject’s complex positioning in a particular social field . . . not on any interior values intrinsic to the sign itself but rather on the shifting and determinative discursive relations which produced it” (20). It can be said, therefore, that the “deploying” and “activating” of the relations of the black female essence to women’s writing in Caribbean feminist aesthetics “have some strategic or interventionary value” (ibid.). And this is also what I would consider as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s “strategic essentialism,” for it is “a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (214). Thus, Caribbean
feminist aesthetics, like Africa-American feminist aesthetics, grounds itself in the construction of the black female essence by its strategic encounter with black (masculinist) and (white) feminist discourses.

My somewhat belabored emphasis here on the proliferating difference of Caribbean feminist aesthetics—the deconstruction of black (masculinist) and (white) feminist discourses and the deployment of black female essence in relation to women’s writing in black feminist aesthetics—is meant to locate the politics of postcolonial West Indian women’s writing. More importantly, I would like to point out that Caribbean feminist aesthetics relates its historical specificities to the postcolonial West Indian women’s writing from the different locales in the black feminist discourses. More clearly put, it is “the context of writing” in itself that demonstrates the different historical configurations offered by West Indian women writers, in Wilson-Tagoe’s words. Thus, what Caribbean feminist aesthetics foregrounds here is the interlocked nature of women’s struggles against the politics of gender and race in women’s writing that fosters and constitutes the different historical configurations of Caribbean women. And it can be said that Caribbean women writers embark on women’s writing with the postcolonial feminist political project to undermine and de-legitimize the assumptions created by the patriarchal and colonial domination of the location of women in history.

In the same vein, my initial citation of Wilson-Tagoe’s essay further accounts for the fact that political and literary writing practices go hand in hand in Caribbean feminist aesthetics to locate different historical configurations. With the deconstruction of the boundaries between the public and private domains, argues Wilson-Tagoe, Caribbean women writers render the politicization of the private and the personalization of the public through their writing. Through recourse to the strategic exposure of the political implication of the personal, Wilson-Tagoe alternates
the private sphere of women’s experience with the politics of the public space. That women pursue their collective and relational identities in the process of individuation is closely associated with the “wider” political space of historical formation, therefore. And, on the other hand, one can also infer from what has been argued above the critical exposure of the personal dimensions of the political; that is to say, the integration of the public domain is politically based on the exclusion of women to the private domestic domain. This is ironically the case if one takes the private sphere of women’s experience as essential to women’s mapping of history in the West Indies. Bridget Brereton, who investigates three kinds of women’s writing as sources for Caribbean history, notes: “one of the greatest insights of women’s history is that no sharp rift existed (or exists) between women’s ‘public’ and ‘private’ lives, and that the ‘private sphere’ has been much more central to the lives of women than of men in most human societies” (147).

The attempt of Wilson-Tagoe at recuperating and recovering the submerged and inarticulate past from postcolonial West Indian women’s writing points to another dimension of the relation between literary writing and history in the West Indies. In its appeal to the traditionally non-historical women’s sphere of experience, postcolonial West Indian women’s writing works in a way to offer the alternative version of history not merely to the exclusively almost male-dominated assumptions of West Indian history, but also to those of traditional Western history. And this argument goes to the very source of the problem of Western historiography that postmodernist critics have engaged with in recent years, a problem that has become a debated issue in both feminist and postcolonial criticism from the perspectives of the politics of gender and location. But a cautionary gesture is necessary to be posed here when I allude to the postmodernist critique of the traditional Western historiography. Not that I slide into the circularity of reasoning in appealing to the
authority of Western historical knowledge when configuring the West Indian history; rather, I would like to foreground its theoretical and political implications for the multi-cultural, poly-dialectical communities of the Western Indian reality.

Wilson-Tagoe’s discussion of the ideological and methodological grounding of Western Indian historiography bears importantly on this topic here. Given the context of colonialism and slavery in the West Indies, Wilson-Tagoe suggests, it is impossible to understand the orientation of Western Indian historiography and the configuration of history in literary writing without Western historical knowledge, especially without knowing Western historiography, philosophy, and literature. The ideological and methodological manifestations of Western historical knowledge impart their own logocentric assumptions to the conceptualization of the colonized peoples and cultures in its Western Indian historiography. Wilson-Tagoe in *Historical Thought and Literary Representation in West Indian Literature* asserts:

To talk of a West Indian historiography is therefore to talk of the convergence of these factors in European historical writing and of their continued impact on the historiography of the region. It is also to talk of the successive stages and cumulative development of historical writing and of how each age has perceived, conveyed, and used the past. In the West Indies the fundamental framework for such writing has been the colonial context. West Indian historiography followed patterns dictated by the circumstances and the exigencies of conquest and by the political, economic, and social implications of slavery and colonialism . . . (14)

I can not rehearse here the full implications of the shifting modes of these links; instead, I would like to confine my discussion to the recapitulation of the postmodernist interrogation of traditional Western Historiography that focuses on the
relations between history and literary writing. In the meantime, I would take a further step to borrow the postmodernist interrogation of the nature of Western historical knowledge to contradict its own epistemological claims to West Indian historiography. This is because Western historiography’s claims are what Hayden White calls “historical consciousness,” by which he means “a specifically western prejudice, by which the presumed superiority of modern, industrial society can be retroactively substantiated” (*Metahistory* 2).

“Historiography too is no longer considered the objective and disinterested recording of the past; it is more an attempt to comprehend and master it by means of some working (narrative/explanatory) model that, in fact, is precisely what grants a particular meaning to the past” (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 64). Linda Hutcheon’s words encapsulate the central focus of the postmodernist interrogation of historiography: that is, the critical exposure of both the political implications of the realistic notions of representation and truth as fundamental to traditional historiography and the congruence of history with literary writing. Linda Hutcheon elsewhere notes: “[i]n both fiction and history writing today, our confidence in empiricist and positivist epistemologies has been shaken-shaken, but perhaps not yet destroyed” (*The Poetics of Postmodernism* 106). This interrogative stance, this contesting of its authority, reflects the coexistence of two opposite epistemological claims in Western historical knowledge—history as the narrative of the past in contradistinction to history as the past. The latter bases its epistemological claims on the so-called objectivist account of the past, resulting from its taking empirical data as truth, while the former points toward a subjectivist epistemology that assumes history as a textualized construct of the past, a mode of discourse that constitutes the articulation of its truth-effects.

In analyzing nineteen-century historical writing, Hayden White gives a
ground-breaking definition of history as “a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of explaining what they were by representing them” (*Metahistory* 3). White’s concern here in this article is not overtly political, but the consequences of his articulation are indeed deeply political. The implicit impulse to verbalize history in a narrative form is but another name for the politics of histor(iograph)y. For White, the so-called historical facts can not speak for themselves; instead, there exists the implicit role of the narrator who, through the system of representation, speaks on his behalf and integrates the fragments of the past into the whole. Histor(iograph)y in itself is not so much the pure documentation of the so-called historical facts as the discursive constructions of what has happened in a narrative form, therefore. Given such a premise, history writing can be further likened to literary writing because it also “emplots” the historical facts as the fictional constructs—selection, organization, interpretation, and so on. White elsewhere clearly points out: “[n]ovelists might be dealing only with imaginary events whereas historians are dealing with real ones, but the process of fusing events, whether imaginary or real, into a comprehensible totality capable of serving the object of a representation is a poetic process” (*Tropics of Discourse* 125). Thus, both history and literary writings turn to the narrative form and, in the very process of representing the events, articulate their political stakes in their interpretation, in fact. This proves what Linda Hutcheon elsewhere asserts, “[b]oth history and fiction are cultural sign systems, ideological constructions whose ideology includes their appearance of being autonomous and self-contained” (*The Poetics of Postmodernism* 112).

In “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” Michel Foucault from another perspective offers a critical instructive tool for disrupting the metaphysics of history. Mapping the Nietzschean analysis of genealogy onto history, he distinguishes “effective
history” from “traditional history” according to their different locales in discourses. Traditional history, as he critically describes, is

   a history whose function is to compose the finally reduced diversity of
time into a totality fully closed upon itself; a history that always
encourages subjective recognitions and attributes a form of reconciliation
to all the displacements of the past; a history whose perspective on all
that precedes it implies the end of time, a completed development.  (87)

A point is well taken here, for it seems to me that Foucault’s articulation in this
passage recapitulates the postmodernist critique of totality, teleology, and continuity
as central to traditional history. As a critical response to “the metahistorical
deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies” (77) that traditional
history falsely celebrates, Foucault offers a strategic alternative of effective history.
It is Foucault’s contention that effective history, or more accurately, genealogy, can
disrupt the metaphysics of traditional history. In its disavowals of metaphysics,
universals, and constants, Foucault’s very genealogical unpacking of history maps out
“the events of history, its jolts, its surprises, its unsteady victories and unpalatable
defeats” (80), all of which lends themselves to the maintenance of “passing events in
their proper dispersion” (81). Against traditional history that appeals to the
teleological ultimate as well as returns to the transcendental origin, Foucault’s
genealogy that stresses the interrupted continuity and the multiplicity of events further
redresses the developments of history as “merely the current episodes in a series of
subjugations” (83). In fact, it is through the momentary manifestation of the
dynamics of contending forces, “the hazardous play of dominations” (83), that
Foucault’s genealogy could activate history and expose the politics of
histor(iograph)y.

To work a little more on the above arguments, the critical valence that Hayden
White and Michel Foucault establish for Western historiography is quite crucial here for the theoretical understanding of postcolonial Western Indian women writers’ histor(iograp)hical configurations although what postmodern historiography in itself embodies is “a certain self-consciousness about a culture’s own historical relativity . . . the loss of the sense of an absoluteness of any Western account of History” (Young 19). In a sense, that Hayden White treats the textual representations of the so-called historical facts as fictional constructs gives support to Wilson-Tagoe’s rendition of the historical configurations in postcolonial West Indian women’s writing. It is by enacting the overlapping and the mutual influence between historical facts and fictional constructs that White goes beyond the boundaries between truthfulness and falseness to destabilize history’s own truth-claims. White asserts history as: “verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much invented as found and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences” (“The Historical Text as Literary Artifact” 82). Foucault’s genealogical unpacking of history that works on “the dispersion of forgotten things” (“Nietzsche, History, Genealogy” 81) further corresponds to Wilson-Tagoe’s attempt to recover the submerged and untold past from the non-historical female sphere of experience in postcolonial West Indian women’s writing. Foucault at the beginning part of this essay declares, “it must record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality; it must seek them in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history” (76). Thus, “the most unpromising places” of women’s experience are the very sites in which women not merely pursue their collective and relational identities but also render their different historical configurations. To sum up this part of my contention, the foregoing arguments pave the way for my investigation of Jamaica Kincaid’s novels. That is, I take them as my way into the historical configurations in Jamaica Kincaid’s autobiographical writings,
which I would like to discuss in the later part of this chapter.

Jamaica Kincaid: The Personal and the Historical Integrated

In terms of the critical and theoretical arguments which have provoked me to reflect on the problematic of history invoked by women’s writing in the West Indies, it would become clear that the West Indian women’s writing in and of itself invites a different understanding of history which has been played off against women and writing. On the one hand, by articulating its critique of the patriarchal and colonial domination of the historical location of Caribbean women, especially in terms of their unequal access to history, West Indian women writers expose in their writings the political implications of historically determined factors of gender and race. On the other hand, West Indian women’s writing can be regarded as a re-enactment and re-engendering of history. West Indian women writers, through the enunciation of the so-called private sphere of women’s experience in their writing practices challenge the constructivist demarcation between the private and the public, the personal and the political spheres and, in doing so, offer different historical configurations of these political spaces. Bridget Brereton, whose argument aims at re-defining autobiographies, diaries, and letters by women, while claiming them as constitutive of Caribbean history, points out, “[t]hough women have left far fewer traces in the written record than men, ‘personal documents’ left by literate women are a key source for women’s history, a channel for the transmission of their own voices” (145).

The political implications of the historical configurations in West Indian women’s writing are evident in Jamaica Kincaid’s autobiographical writing. Kincaid’s autobiographical writing, which gives a gendered testimony to the historical experience of a young woman in the West Indies, has the dimensions of what Bridget Brereton calls “the personal documents.” That is, those documents “speak to the
reality and texture of women’s lives, so much of them played out in the private and
domestic spheres” (160), and, consequently, are of great importance in reconstructing
Caribbean history. Asked by an interviewer about the autobiographical elements in
her writing, Kincaid once asserted:

My writing has been very autobiographical. The events are true to me. . . . There is no reason for me to be a writer without autobiography.

. . . For me it was really an act of saving my life, so it had to be autobiographical. I am someone who had to make sense out of my past. It is turning out that it is much more complicated than that when I say my past, because for me I have to make sense of my ancestral past—where I am from, my historical past, my group historical past, my group ancestry. So I could not be a writer the way that grand men used to be writers, like Dickens, or grand women.

(Ferguson, “A Lot of Memory” 176; italics mine)

Kincaid’s assertion of the double reference of the past itself embedded in her autobiographical writing—that is, first, to her personal past; and second, to her group historical past—reflects the political dimension of her oppositional autobiographical practices, for they not only help her make sense of her past, but, more importantly, helps to reconstruct the West Indian history. The first meaning of the past—her personal past—describes Kincaid’s personal experience of growing up as and being a woman in the Caribbean. The second meaning of the past—her group historical past—sketches the haunting Caribbean history of slavery and colonization against which Kincaid’s personal history of gendered experience has been silhouetted. The two dimensions of the past foreground the political necessity and creative possibilities of configuring Caribbean history in the so-called personal document of her autobiographical writing.
Kincaid’s conceptualization of Caribbean history as domestic activities also provides a richly suggestive framework for aligning her personal past with her group historical past in her autobiographical writing. Kincaid states in another interview:

When I was little I had this great mind for history. And I never really understood it until I realized that the reason I liked history is that I always reduced it to domestic activity. History was what people did.

It was organized along the lines of who said what and who did what, not really unlike how the society in which I grew up was organized. The idea that things are impersonal occurrences is very alien to me. I personalize everything. (Perry 504; italics mine)

For Kincaid, the configuration of domestic activities is nothing other than yet another version of Caribbean history. It is “the lines of who said what and who did what,” namely, the Foucauldian “singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality” (“Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 76), that constitutes Caribbean history. It is these which are the primary elements constitutive of her historical configurations. And it is also these which echo White’s observation of the nature of the narrative as a mode of interpretation that runs through her historical configurations because she, “in the interest of explaining what they were by representing them” (Metahistory 2), personalizes everything.

Epitomizing the general features of the personal documents as the sources for the past, this fusion of the personal with the historical here in Kincaid’s writing calls further attention to the ways in which her autobiographical practices make sense of the past. In light of the foregoing arguments, we can infer from White’s thesis on history that autobiography and history stand on the same critical ground. This is not merely because both employ the narrative form to reconstruct the past but also because there is the essentialist fictionality of the past embedded in both narrative
forms. However, autobiographical narratives traditionally privilege the personal events in the life span of the writers whereas historical narratives relate to the events of the past within the collective framework. We might possibly account for the political empowerment that Kincaid turns on in her strategic integration of the personal and collective history if we situate her autobiographical writing in its specific socio-historical, institutional, and cultural context.

In contrast to the general critical practice that celebrates individualism as the precondition for autobiography, Susan Standford Friedman, from the perspective of gender politics, contends that the individualistic concept of the autobiographical self as the generic definition excludes the question of individuation crucial to women and minorities. Friedman critiques the individualist paradigm of the self as evident in Georges Gusdorf’s article “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography” by stressing “the importance of a culturally imposed group identity for women and minorities” (4). Meanwhile she also foregrounds “the difference in socialization in the construction of male and female gender identity,” and “the role of collective and relational identities in the individuation process of women and minorities” (5). Friedman’s foregrounding of gender politics in genre criticism, a gesture aiming at challenging the male-devised conventions and canons of Western autobiography, brings us to investigate the problematic relation of self to language that is set in motion in women’s autobiography. In this regard, Leigh Gilmore’s theory of “autobiographics” further provides an insightful and critical vocabulary well suited for exploring women’s autobiography as modes of resistance and political empowerment. In her critique of the traditional conception of autobiography as the representation of one’s factual life, Gilmore argues that autobiography, incorporating her so-called “the technology of autobiography,” constructs the story of one’s life, in fact. More clearly put, it is the discursive and institutional practices of truth and
identity that autobiography incorporates to construct one’s life story. Gilmore’s theory of “autobiographics,” which aims at erupting and interrupting mainstream discursive and institutional constructions, recognizes the possibilities for locating the disruptive writing practices in autobiographies and those texts that have not been traditionally authorized as autobiographies. Gilmore asserts in Autobiographics: “[a]utobiographics, as a description of self-representation and as a reading practice, is concerned with interruptions and eruptions, with resistance and contradiction as strategies of self-representation” (42).

Significantly, Gilmore, by proposing a counter-discursive strategy of autobiographics, interprets the political implications of women’s autobiographical writings as forms of resistance. So redefined by her, autobiographics becomes both a critical move and a political strategy. However, although Gilmore’s critical gesture is very helpful to our investigation of Kincaid’s autobiographical writing, autobiography still poses a further problem for readers of Kincaid who are uncertain whether Kincaid’s indulgence in stretching out her conflict with her mother—a blatantly autobiographical script—can be taken as a “resisting” feminist writing practice. The point in debate is, however, that if Western feminist autobiography criticism aims to disrupt the patriarchal discursive properties of autobiography for white First World women, does it serve the same function for Kincaid in the postcolonial situation of the West Indies? since, as a postcolonial subject, she is simultaneously marked by discourses of gender, race, and nationality. In her critical elaboration of the transnational practices of autobiography as a feminist writing strategy, Caren Kaplan cautions that Western feminist autobiography criticism might risk duplicating the imperialist gesture of Western autobiography criticism if it fails to consider women’s autobiographical writings in different locations. By the way of foregrounding feminist autobiographical writings, namely, “the out-law genres,”
Kaplan further pinpoints the very operation of the law of genre that regulates the production and the consumption of autobiography. For Kaplan, the cultural practices of out-law genres, which effects the deconstruction of autobiography in transnational feminist criticism, requires disruptive writing and reading strategies in locating their differences across different modalities of discourses. In her words, “these emerging out-law genres require more collaborative procedures that are more closely attuned to the power differences among participants in the process of producing the text” (119). Therefore, Kaplan continues: “instead of a discourse of individual authorship, we find a discourse of situation; a ‘politics of location’” (ibid.).

Kaplan’s argument about out-law genres, which locates their cultural practices of differences, corresponds to the political thrust of West Indian women’s writing that I have elaborated in the earlier part of this chapter. As I have previously mentioned, West Indian women’s writing appropriates the black feminist discourses to aestheticize their feminist writing, thereby deploying a “strategic essentialism” that, in foregrounding their politics of location, helps to proliferate the differences of their textual performance. In a similar vein, autobiographical out-law genres that appropriate and contest the authority of Western (feminist) autobiography locate the politics of their writing differences. And this counter-discursive strategy of “appropriation” is the very theory and practice of textual resistance that Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin develop in their *The Empire Writes Back*. In a sense, the political empowerment that Kincaid attempts to turn on in her writing reflects the fact that she appropriates the generic conventions and assumptions of autobiography for a political purpose, since she attempts to make sense of and write into autobiography her personal and group history. Regardless of the fact that she belongs to “people like me,” whose writing fails to meet formal properties of traditional autobiography, Kincaid emphasizes the importance of the location of her
articulation in an interview: “[w]hen people think of falling standards, they must be thinking of people like me who just sort of usurp all the boundaries and just mix them up and just cross borders all the time” (Ferguson, “A Lot of Memory” 166). As she continues: “[w]e just have no interest in the formalities. We are not interested in being literary people. We have something to say that is really urgent” (ibid.).

It is within this framework of the theoretical and critical confluence of tensions and contradictions, then, that I would pursue my investigation of the autobiographical gesture in Kincaid’s writing practices. For my examples, I would choose Kincaid’s three novels, *Annie John*, *Lucy*, and, *The Autobiography of My Mother*, all of which can be linked through their shared theme of mother-daughter relations. As such, the crucial point to note about the thematic recurrence of mother-daughter relations in Kincaid’s autobiographical writing is not that of a daughter’s struggle with her mother in terms of psycho-linguistic theory, but rather of the contextualization of the political implications of mother-daughter relations in the (post-) colonial West Indies. Kincaid herself, after observing her writing, added as an afterthought in an interview: “In my first two books, I used to think I was writing about my mother and me” (Ferguson “A Lot of Memory” 176). And then she continues to say that: “Later I began to see that I was writing about the relationship between the powerful and the powerless. That’s become an obsessive theme, and I think it will be a theme for as long as I write” (ibid.). In other words, the thematic recurrence of mother-daughter relations she performs encompasses the central terrain of Kincaid’s concern, the relations of power that she all the time struggles against.

The double-reference of mother-daughter relations also complicates the presentation of the mother figures in Kincaid’s autobiographical writing. In her *Jamaica Kincaid: Where the Land meets the Body*, Moira Ferguson analyzes the mother figures in Kincaid’s novels as “both colonial and biological,” for only such an
approach can “explains why the mother-daughter relations in her fiction often seem so harshly rendered” (1). What Ferguson points out here is a close identification of the biological motherhood with the symbolic motherland in Kincaid’s presentation of the maternal figures. That is to say, the mother figures that Kincaid’s fictional alter egos struggle with encompass their colonial motherlands as well as their biological mothers. Given such a premise, it can be said that the ambiguities of the West Indian women’s relations to their motherlands parallel the ambivalence of the daughters toward their mothers. The intersection and complicity of the biological mothers with androcentrism and colonialism complicate mother-daughter relations and, at the same time, account for the difficulties the West Indian women would encounter when they attempt to recuperate their “true” motherlands. Keith E. Byerman in his “Anger in a Small Place” points out that “[p]art of the difficulty for Kincaid is the inability to identify a true motherland, an Antiguan culture that is separable from that of the colonizers and ‘tourists’ ” (94). “Slavery and colonialism did not displace or suppress an indigenous society,” continues he, “they created Antigua” (ibid.).

Byerman’s observation makes explicit what Kincaid has to struggle with in her autobiographical writing when there is no “true” motherland for her to recuperate. For the West Indian women, the adulteration of slavery and colonialism with the purity of the West Indian history gives rise to the re-conceptualization of their motherland, however. Ann R. Morris and Margaret M. Dunn, in “The Bloodstream of Our Inheritance: Female Identity and the Caribbean Mothers’-land,” clearly point out:

For the Caribbean woman, the notion of a motherland is especially complex, encompassing in its connotations her island home and its unique culture as well as the body of tropes, talismans and female bonding that is a woman’s heritage through her own and other mothers.
The island and one’s mothers, then, are co-joined. (219)

Their assertion highlights the multi-reference of “the notion of a motherland” structured by the West Indian women’s writing. And it justifies and opens up the possibilities that Kincaid writes into the absence of motherland an imaginary motherland through the complex interactions between mothers and daughters, or more clearly put, the powerful and the powerless, in Kincaid’s autobiographical writing.

Kincaid’s three novels I choose to analyze focus on the daughters’ representation of their relations to their mothers, which I take as a historical configuration of the West Indian women’s relations to their motherlands. More clearly put, Kincaid goes beyond the personal relations of daughters to mothers to offer her post-colonial investigation of the West Indian women’s political relations to their colonial motherlands. Against the role of the mother in the formation of the daughter, Kincaid’s autobiographical writing should be considered as an attempt to re-enact the mother-daughter relations that emphasize the agency of the daughter rather than that of the mother. In re-telling and re-shaping the autobiographical events in her mother-daughter stories, Kincaid attempts to create different versions of her personal stories with variations and, at the same time, to negotiate the possibilities for configuring her West Indian history. In light of her autobiographical writing as a form of resistance, I would examine how Kincaid’s novels, which mobilize the thematic mother-daughter relations, integrate her personal stories with the group history of the West Indies, and the politics of the power relations their historical configuration of the West Indies implicates.

Kincaid’s Annie John portrays the story of the title character’s childhood and of her transition to young adulthood. As a matter of fact, since the daughter’s life revolves around the mother’s, the story in and of itself is as much about Annie’s mother as about Annie herself. Throughout the story, Annie’s mother oscillates, in
Annie’s rendering of their relations, between an individual with a name and a history, and a mother figure, who is, a shaping force of Annie’s personal history. Instead of easily fitting in a stereotypical maternal role as nurturer, as I have previously pointed out, Annie’s mother frustrates Annie’s expectation and becomes alternatively sources of love as well as terror. And such vacillation of Annie’s mother between love and betrayal, affection and oppression reveals the complex interaction between the daughter and the mother. Through the thematic deployment of mother-daughter relations, a strategy which renders the private sphere of women’s experience of political relevance, Kincaid produces a highly personal and, at the same time, highly political text that historically reconfigures the West Indies.

There is no question about Annie’s worship of the mother figure in her adoration with her mother at first. The strong mother-daughter relations have been mainly demonstrated and valorized in a sequence of intimate scenes when Annie and her mother jointly participate in domestic activities and duties. The routines of together choosing bread and butter at the grocery store, selecting fruit and vegetables at the market, distinguishing fish and crabs, cooking their lunch, and doing the laundry on the school holidays become their shared experience and foster their closeness and intimacy. Annie is fascinated by her mother’s shrewdness in expertly running a home and family when she indulges in her motherly love: “[h]ow important I felt to be with my mother” (15). The private sphere of domestic chores becomes the occasion in which Annie’s mother not merely shows her motherly love, but also shares women’s heritage. It is no wonder that Annie would claim: “[i]t was in such a paradise that I lived” (25).

It is noteworthy that the private sphere of women’s experience, which strengthens their mother-daughter relations on the surface, bears deep cultural dimensions, in fact. Each time when Annie and her mother clean the wooden trunk,
which her mother carried with when she left home but now contains the mementos of Annie’s childhood, Annie’s mother would take out all the items and tell the stories about Annie. For Annie, “it was a tremendous pleasure . . . as she [her mother] held each thing in her hand she would tell me a story about myself . . . Whichever way, I knew exactly what she would say, for I had heard it so many times before, but I never got tired of it” (21). The wooden trunk, for Annie, becomes itself as a bridge that links her to a matrilineal culture, connecting Annie’s personal history to that of her mother. Another example could also be found in the relatedness of the very act of bathing to the ritualistic performance of the Obeah, for the bath that Annie and her mother usually take together can be taken as the demonstration of their intimacy and closeness. As Annie describes, “we took these baths after my mother had consulted with her obeah woman, and with her mother and a trusted friend, and all three of them had confirmed that from the look of things around our house” (14-5). The protective baths that these obeah women suggest them to take no doubt serve to exorcise the evil spirits. Since the evil spirits that women invoke work for them to take revenge on Annie and her mother for her father’s infidelity, it can be said that the threatening dangers of the social milieu are framed in those of supernatural power. Thus, the ritualized baths in and of themselves usher Annie into the social milieu of the West Indies and familiarizes her with the politics of the female experience that the Obeah implicates.

The relations of Annie to her mother get worse as Annie reaches the age of puberty: “[s]omething I could not name just came over us, and suddenly I had never loved anyone so or hated anyone so” (88). For Annie, her mother who used to treat her with great care and affection abruptly turns into a mother figure who has authority over her although she still adores her and would do anything to please her. In order to re-assume her close relations with her mother, Annie even naively thinks of curbing
her physically maturing body even when she clearly understands that her relations with her mother have been irrevocably altered by her mother’s reactions to her puberty. As Annie says, “[s]ometimes we would both forget the new order of things and would slip into our old ways. But that didn’t last very long” (29). In the meantime, Annie seemingly challenges her mother’s authority in making a lady-like girl out of her. Annie’s acts of purposefully embarrassing and irritating her etiquette and piano teachers can be understood as acts of resistance challenging the authority of her mother. The same examples could be also found in her acts of surreptitiously playing marbles with the Skerritt boys and making friends with the red girl.

Paradoxically, even after she has done all the things which her mother forbid her to do, Annie remains hopelessly embroiled in emotional fixation on her mother and consequently gets sick without reason. Annie’s own words disclose her inner thoughts. “Before, if I hated someone I simply wished the person dead. But I couldn’t wish my mother dead. If my mother died, what would become of me? I couldn’t imagine my life without her” (88).

Annie’s illness at this point enables the novel to pursue its thematic deployment of mother-daughter relations, since her illness encompasses in its connotations the embodiment of gender-based and deep cultural contradictions. Ma Chess’s words after she physically examines Annie clearly hint at the implications of Annie’s illness: “Not like Johnnie. Not like Johnnie at all” (124). For her grandmother Ma Chess, Annie’s illness, unlike her Uncle Johnnie’s physical illness, embodies her transition from love to hatred, from identification to alienation in her confrontation with her mother. Ma Chess who resorts to the Obeah to restore Annie to health assumes the maternal role as nurturer. In the daytime, she treats Annie like a child and does what Annie’s mother used to do; in the nighttime, she would lie down beside Annie whenever Annie falls into a trance. As she describes, “I would lie on my side, curled
up like a little comma, and Ma Chess would lie next to me, curled up like a bigger comma, into which I fit” (126). For a moment, Annie seemingly returns to the nurturing womb of her mother and alternatively reunites herself, if not with her mother, then at least with her grandmother.

Ironically, Annie’s mother attends her father when Ma Chess takes care of her since her father and Ma Chess “didn’t see the world in the same way” (126). As such, Annie’s mother “did not show more of an interest in obeah things” (123) although she would still resort to them whenever she is needed. In order to avoid provoking her father, who prefers the medical treatment of the West, Annie’s mother would even arrange the shelf “in a new way, with Dr. Stephens’s prescriptions in the front and Ma Jolie’s prescriptions in the back” (118). Just as the young lady business that she arranges to make a lady-like girl of Annie shows her internalization of gender-biased assumptions of the colonizers, so her posture against the Obeah reveals her valorization of the West over the West Indies. Thus, Kincaid’s rendering of mother-daughter relations through her illness is, in effect, the very interrogation of the male-centered values and colonial mores that the mother figure uncritically endorses at the sacrifice of both her daughter’s and her own individuality and culture. And the coupling of an adorable nurturer with an abominable oppressor in the maternal figure seemingly accounts for Annie’s illness, that is, her difficulty in identifying a true mother. As Annie describes their shared name, “[s]he was my mother, Annie; I was her daughter, Annie” (105). The identical name that Annie and her mother share strengthens their matrilineal bond while at the same time it further complicates their relations.

Kincaid’s *Lucy* begins with the arrival of the title character in New York City as if it continues the story from the moment when Annie takes her leave for England in *Annie John*. As Kincaid’s *Annie John* concludes, Annie rebels against her mother’s
formation of her as a proper lady and leaves Antigua for England where she would continue her education as a nurse student. In Kincaid’s *Lucy*, which begins at the point of the title character’s emigration to New York city, we seem to see the same character who has the same relations to the same mother reappear in this novel although the title character’s name here is Lucy. Despite the difference in their names and their settings, Annie John and Lucy could be seen as the same character; both are the fictionalized versions of Kincaid. Gilmore interprets Kincaid’s autobiographical strategy of shifting the signifier of the name as “a way of deflecting the literal truth-telling demands of the autobiographical pact while inscribing a different discourse of truth telling, one that is more adequate to representing the ‘truth’ and ‘identity’ of a ‘post’-colonial subject” (101). As the manifestation of “intertextual continuity” (ibid.), *Annie John* and *Lucy* seem to frame Kincaid’s personal stories within the history of the West Indies while at the same time they also criticize the division between autobiography and fiction.

*Lucy* portrays the story of a young West Indian woman working as an *au pair* for a white middle-class family in New York City. Like her *Annie John*, which deploys the thematic performance of mother-daughter relations, Kincaid’s *Lucy* features the title character Lucy who struggles with her mother—more clearly put, the politics of gender and culture the mother figure implicates. Unlike her *Annie John*, Kincaid’s *Lucy* features two maternal figures: the one is her biological mother; the other is her surrogate mother, her mistress Mariah. The former is the one whom she was born of but is desperately trying to separate from; the latter is the one who acts as her white mistress but treats her with maternal love. In this novel, Kincaid alternatively implicates these two mother figures in the politics of mother-daughter relations when the title character Lucy struggles to start her new life, and to begin her new story. And thereby, Kincaid goes beyond her post-colonialist critique of the
West Indies to include as an object of criticism the United States which is now taken as the neo-colonialist center in her attempts to configure the West Indian history.

Like Annie John’s rebellion against her mother, Lucy’s resistance against her mother focuses on her mother’s uncritical acceptance of the patriarchal values and the colonial mores at the cost of her daughter’s individuality. Lucy’s mother would expect and feel proud of her boys’ pursuing their studies in England and their future success in acquiring the position of critical importance in society while she puts a limit on Lucy’s self-development so that Lucy has to be chained to social conventions. As she deplores: “I felt a sword go through my heart, for there was no accompanying scenario in which she saw me, her only identical offspring, in a remotely similar situation” (130). Lucy’s separation from her mother turns out to be the necessary step she has to take in order to pursue her self-independence even though she doubts if she could succeed to cut herself off from her mother. “If I could put enough events between me and the events mentioned in the letter,” says Lucy when she has left her mother, “would I not be free to take everything just as it came and not see hundreds of years in every gesture, every word spoken, every face?” (31).

Lucy’s relations with her white mistress do not fit in the conventional expectations of the relations between the employer and the employee. As a matter of fact, Lucy establishes a kind of mother-daughter relations with her white mistress although she works as an au pair for her family. She loves Mariah as her mother, and she hates her for the same reason: “[t]he times that I loved Mariah it was because she reminds me of my mother. The times that I did not love Mariah it was because she reminded me of my mother” (58). The scenes that Mariah deals with domestic chores and takes care of her children with tenderness and gratitude remind Lucy of her mother. A mother of four children, Mariah shows her maternal affection for her own children as well as for Lucy. For Lucy, unlike her mother, who cares only about
her own wishes, Mariah looks after her needs. Mariah respects her choice to make
friends with Peggy although Mariah does not like her at all; in order to console her,
Mariah takes her to the museum to see the paintings of a French man, Paul Gaugin,
who has the same experience of living outside home. Mariah even buys her a
collection of photographs when Lucy shows interest in some of the photographs she
sees in the museum. Well aware of Lucy’s loneliness, Mariah and, her husband,
Lewis together give a party to make her meet people when they spent their vacation in
the house on the Great Lake.

Lucy’s words indicate that her mistress Mariah and her mother may be different
in race and cultural upbringings; however, both assume the maternal role and have
authority over Lucy in order to make her a replica of them. That Mariah urges Lucy
as well as her children to see the things in her way when they are in her house on the
Great Lake draws a parallel between Mariah and Lucy’s mother. It strikes Lucy at
the heart of her being and makes her firmly decide against accepting Mariah’s
suffocating love. Lucy says: “I had come to feel that mother’s love for me was
designed solely to make me into an echo of her; and I didn’t know why, but I felt that
I would rather be dead than become just an echo of someone” (36). It is important to
note, however, that, under the shadow of history, Kincaid foregrounds the conflicts of
race and culture in their mother-daughter relations. Haunted by slavery and
colonialism, Lucy from the outset has been presented as keenly aware of their
differences. For Lucy, the daffodils register the textuality of Empire that works to
interpellate her while, for Mariah, they, as part of the nature, are literally beautiful.
For Lucy, the scene that the diners and the waiters in the dining car draws a parallel
between Mariah and herself while, for Mariah, everything is taken for granted. For
Lucy, “the mantle of a servant” is what she wears as she leaves home while the
self-exiled French smacks of “the perfume of the hero” (95); for Mariah, they are all
the same, however. Without understanding the historical colonial background in which Lucy has grown up, Mariah as a surrogate mother becomes an accomplice with the androcentrist and neo-colonialist enterprise of the United States, in a sense. Thus, the act of Lucy’s leaving Mariah at the end of the story also becomes the necessary step she has to take when she attempts to start her new life, begin her new story.

Obviously, the question that Lucy previously poses with a conditional cause already has a self-fulfilling answer. Lucy’s attempt of starting a new life in New York, away from her mother, ironically ties her even more closely with the West Indies. “But almost everything I did now was something I had never done before,” as Lucy herself points out, “and so the new was no longer thrilling to me unless it reminded me of the past” (30-1). As such, her past experience in her colonial motherland enables her to critically historize rather than naively embrace bodily movements and spoken words she encounters in the neo-colonialist metropolis.

Lucy’s mother and her mistress Mariah respectively represent the West Indies and New York City, in a sense. Lucy’s confrontation with New York City, which indicates her disavowal of colonization, routes itself via her post-colonialist critique of the West Indies. And these two mother figures structure the novel in the sense that there would be no point for Lucy to start her new story, unless she subsequently leaves her mother and her mistress Mariah.

Whereas Kincaid in *Annie John* and *Lucy* presents the autobiographical events by re-telling and re-shaping her coming-of-age and young adulthood, Kincaid presents *The Autobiography of My Mother* as the memoir of a seventy year-old heroine. *The Autobiography of My Mother* shifts back and forth between the heroine’s past-tense narration of the defensive strategies she was compelled to take up as a motherless child in a loveless world and the present-tense narration of her self-examination of these same strategies from the vantage points of having survived
all. Whereas *Annie John* and *Lucy* oppose their historical configurations against the presence of the mother, *The Autobiography of My Mother* structures its historical configuration around the absence of her mother. They respectively embody Kincaid’s oppositional autobiographical strategies, while their historical configurations are grounded in the problematic relations of daughters to mothers.

The strategy for deploying an oppositional autobiographical practice is all the more apparent in Kincaid’s *The Autobiography of My Mother* if we from the outset notice the implications of the title and the style of the novel. The very title and very style of Kincaid’s *The Autobiography of My Mother* refer to autobiographical writing, though Kincaid’s novel, this time, is relocated in Dominica, one of the many islands of the West Indies, rather than Antigua, the island where she was born and grew up. Paradoxically, the very title and the very style of *The Autobiography of My Mother* are also referentially ambiguous, and deliberately so since, as I have previously pointed out, it is not the story of Xuela’s mother, as a matter of fact. Rather, like her *Annie John* and *Lucy*, which depict the stories of her fictional alter egos in relations to their mothers in the West Indies, Kincaid’s *The Autobiography of My Mother* portrays the story of another fictional alter ego of hers, Xuela, living her motherless life in Dominica.

Within the very first few lines of this novel, Xuela expressly signals to her reader that her mother dies of childbirth. “My mother died at the moment I was born, and so far my whole life there was nothing standing between myself and eternity; at my back was always a bleak, bleak wind” (3). Xuela reveals her preoccupation with the loss of her mother to the extent that Xuela’s mother haunts Xuela as she haunts the whole story, however. Consequently, in *The Autobiography of My Mother*, Xuela is in fact telling the story of two Xuelas while she is populating the untold story of one Xuela with the retold story of another Xuela, who is also the narrator.
The course of Xuela’s motherless life is mainly comprised of her encounters with a series of families that offer her no alternative maternal love, but makes her rather loveless in a sense. Xuela’s motherless life begins with her encounter with Ma Eunice, the laundress to whom her father leaves her as well as his dirty clothes shortly after her mother dies of childbirth. For Xuela, Ma Eunice acts as a foster mother, offering her nothing more than her physical survival although Ma Eunice treats her in the same way that she treats her own six children—as Xuela ironically implies, in a cruel and brutal way. As a matter of fact, Ma Eunice represents the very stereotype of the colonized, whose taking for granted her own brutal and cruel treatment of her children epitomizes the West Indies’s alienation from itself because of its dependent relations with the colonizer. “In a place like this,” as Xuela says, “brutality is the only real inheritance and cruelty is sometimes the only thing freely given” (5). Without surprise, Ma Eunice can never find it ironic that there is a parallel between the brutality of slavery and colonialism and that of her severely punishing Xuela for breaking her plate. Nor can she find out that the picture on the plate she worships as heaven is, indeed, the very pastoral scene of the British colonizer’s country. Xuela’s refusal to apologize for breaking Ma Eunice’s plate reveals her developing consciousness of resistance in compensation for her motherless-ness while simultaneously it interrogates the alienation of the West Indians from themselves. As she insistently holds, “it was beyond my own will; those words could not pass my lips” (10). Xuela cannot feel sorry for wreaking havoc on such loveless people.

The story of Xuela’s motherless-ness continues with her encounter with her stepmother, the Creole woman whom her father marries to provide her with a home. A precocious child, Xuela acquires a stronger sense of her stepmother’s resentfulness toward her when she first meets her at night. As she instinctively responds: “[s]he
had the face of evil. I had no other face to compare it with; I knew only that hers
was the face of evil as far as I could tell. She did not like me. I could see that.
She did not love me. I could see that.” (28). In fact, Xuela’s stepmother all the time
feels threatened by the possible influence of her as the child of her husband’s former
beloved wife. Behind the façade of her stepmother’s maternal affection for her is a
hypocritical performance of apathy, distrust, and hatred in the presence of her husband.
A case in point is that whenever her husband is absent from home, Xuela’s stepmother
always speaks to Xuela in French patois rather than English in order to make her
illegitimate in a sense. Ironically, whenever she speaks to Xuela with the so-called
“made-up language of people regarded as not real—the shadow people, the forever
humiliated, the forever low” (31), she humiliates Xuela in the way that reflects her
sense of humiliation by the language she speaks. In unkindly presenting a poisoned
necklace as a gift to Xuela, furthermore, Xuela’s stepmother boldly manifests her
extremely murderous resentfulness toward Xuela. Unaware that Xuela was no
longer innocent and inexperienced: “I was not a real child” (34), she murders her
beloved dog that her husband gives to protect her instead. Fearful of losing favor
with her husband, Xuela’s stepmother does not stop making attempts one way or
another to kill her until she gives birth to her own children, until Xuela finally leaves
home. For Xuela, her stepmother is nothing like her mother. And her fearlessness
turns out to be the posture of defiance she has to assume and the requisite for her
survival as a motherless child. As she ironically remarks, “[m]y spirit rose to meet
this challenge. No love: I could live in a place like this. I knew this atmosphere all
too well” (29). “Love would have defeated me. Love would always defeat me,”
continues she, “[i]n an atmosphere of no love I could live well; in this atmosphere of
no love I could make a life for myself” (ibid.).

These encounters prompt Xuela to imaginatively align her motherless

106
childhood with that of her mother’s and to map the story of her motherless life onto that of her mother’s. Just as Xuela has been born motherless, so no sooner had her mother Xuela been born than she was deserted at the door of a convent. In one revealing moment at the end of this novel, Kincaid clearly associates the account of the mother with that of the daughter. “The account of my life has been an account of my mother’s life as much as it has been an account of mine, and even so, again it is an account of the life of the children I did not have, as it is their account of me” (228). Xuela refers to her autobiographical writing as a re-enactment of the birth process that gives life to her mother. And writing the daughter’s life turns out to be inseparable from writing the mother into life.

It is noteworthy that the very fact of their shared motherless-ness in this mother-daughter story plays with the referential ambiguity of their shared name. Brought up by a French nun Claudette Desvarieux, Xuela’s mother is named after her as Xuela Claudette Desvarieux. The identical name that the mother and the daughter share works to empower Kincaid’s oppositional autobiographical practice: “[m]y own name is her name, Xuela Claudette, and in the place of the Desvarieux is Richardson, which is my father’s name” (79), for it re-imagines and re-writes this matrilineal bond in its adept use of the referentiality of Xuela’s story. On the other hand, their identical name also works to integrate the personal and the historical in this mother-daughter story because it epitomizes the Dominica’s history of colonial domination. Xuela explains her unspeakable sense of anger and humiliation when she has to mention her name: “[f]or the name of any one person is at once her history recapitulated and abbreviated, and on declaring it, that person holds herself high or low, and the person hearing it hold the declarer high or low” (79). More clearly put, their shared name bears the marks of both their personal account and the group history of the West Indies’ s subordination to the colonization of the West—whatever they are,
Claudette, Desvarieux, or Richardson.

In her (young) adulthood, Xuela’s decision not to love others is apparently fueled by her earlier experience of being cut off from maternal love as well as having lived in a world without love. Not merely is she determined not to love others, she also comes to the defiant and narcissistic decision to love no one else but herself. Xuela demonstrates her fierce and obsessive self-love mainly in her sexual relations with the three married men—her seduction by Monsieur LaBatte, her father’s illicit business partner, her affair with Roland, a stevedore, and her affair with and marriage to Philip, an English doctor. When she leaves for the household of a childless couple in Roseau and continues her education there, Xuela embarks on her sexual adventures. The wife Madame LaBatte who has been unable to conceive tricks Xuela into having sexual relations with her husband Monsieur LaBatte. Despite the fact that Xulea has affection for and sympathizes with Madame LaBatte, Xuela immediately turns to abortion when she finds out Madame LaBatte’s trick to have a child by her: “[s]he wants to make a gift of me to her husband; she wants to give me to him, she hopes I do not mind” (68). Xuela’s abortion reveals her determination to pursue her self-independence: “I had carried my life in my hands” (83) while it indicates her refusal to embrace the lovelessness as the legacy of colonial Dominica.

Disavowing the marital status and the procreative purpose conventionally assigned to women, Xuela indulges in her sexual practice and dissociates sex from love, love from marriage. Despite the fact that she maintains her sexual relations with both Roland and Philip at once, Xuela decisively chooses to possess herself. As she says, “[t]he impulse to possess is alive in every heart, and some people choose wide seas, and some people choose husbands; I choose to possess myself” (174). Xuela refuses to reduce herself to one of the many women on Roland’s name list as Roland’s wife does although she admits her love for Roland. Meanwhile, she
emasculates Roland’s male sexual prowess when she ironically compares Roland’s life history of sexual prowess with Western history of colonial prowess. Xuela ironically deplores: “I felt much sorrow for him, for his life was reduced to a list of names that were not countries, and to the number of times he brought the monthly flow of blood to a halt” (175-6). When she approaches her middle age, Xuela even chooses to marry the English doctor Philip whom she does not love but has sexual intercourse with. Under the shadow of history, the marriage between Philip and Xuela serves as specters to each other, acting as each other’s haunting spells of what has happened between the victor and the vanquished: “He and I lived in this spell, the spell of history” (218). Through her marital relations, the colonizer/colonized relationship between them is reticently changed when Xuela purposefully blocks his entrance to the world he has come to know in her mediation and translation for him.

From her birth as a motherless child to her old age as a childless mother, the story of Xuela’s motherless-ness epitomizes the wretchedness of the (post-) colonial West Indian history. Xuela’s nihilistic response to the loveless world suggests the absence of maternal love as the metaphorical cause and effect underpinning the West Indians’ alienation from their motherland. By presenting Xuela as the symptom of this loveless world, Kincaid gives ironic stress to the political necessity of actively refusing to accept the negativity of such loveless-ness as the legacy of their motherless history. The hollowness of Xuela’s sexual practice, whether or not it can be regarded as a manifestation of her feminist self-love, gives this motherless story an ironic twist that requires us to re-examine the disruption into the relations that colonialism has brought to the West Indians.

The mother-daughter relations portrayed in the novels allude to the politics of power relations in general. The ongoing struggle between the mother and the daughter is an attempt to redress the politics of power relations. Kincaid, through
the thematic deployment of mother-daughter relations, renders the personal of political relevance in her autobiographical writing. The mother figures thematically register themselves in the ambiguous way that they are at once biological and colonial. On the one hand, the mother figures work to maintain and strengthen the matrilineal bond in the so-called private sphere of women’s experience. Under the shadow of history, on the other, the mother figures are presented as willing or inadvertent accomplices of their subjugation to the patriarchal and colonialist rules and practices. By depicting this coming-of-age story, *Annie John* associates the title character’s uneasy relations with Antigua with her ambivalent relations with her mother. Delineating the au pair story of the title character’s one-year life in New York City, *Lucy* frames the title character’s struggle with her mother within her resistance against her surrogate mother Mariah. Mapping the story of Xuela’s motherless life onto that of her mother’s, *The Autobiography of My Mother* works against the motherless-ness in the West Indies to the extent that it testifies to the presence of the mother and renames the harsh reality in which she lives. The mother-daughter relations structure these autobiographical novels in the sense that they are both personal and historical. Silhouetted against daughters’ personal relations with mothers are the West Indian women’s historical relations with their motherland. Drawing on the thematic deployment of mother-daughter relations, Kincaid foregrounds the political empowerment that she attempts to turn on in her autobiographical writing; that is, to re-dress the power relations between, in her own words, the powerful and the powerless. Besides, her writing practices of re-imaging and re-writing her autobiographical events into different versions show her attempt to exhaust all the possibilities of mapping West Indian history. More importantly, Kincaid’s writing practices problematicize the epistemological foundations of Western historical knowledge, since they boldly play fictional constructs off against historical facts.
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