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**POSTCOLONIALISM, DISLOCATION, AND QUEST FOR FREEDOM IN  
JAMAICA KINCAID'S *ANNIE JOHN, LUCY, MR. POTTER AND,  
SEE NOW THEN: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL***

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**Abstract:**

*Jamaica Kincaid started her literary carrier initially as a columnist but today she is undoubtedly one of the outstanding novelists writing profusely on the contemporary Caribbean life and the West Indies. She, being a versatile and prolific writer, in her writings mainly focuses on gender crisis, American life, quest for freedom, and postcolonial experiences. Her novels are multi-thematic and reflect clearly some severe psychological experiences pertaining to her homeland and family. Her themes comprise innocence, racism, power, Postcolonialism education, quest for freedom, exile and return to the mother land.*

*In this paper, an attempt will be made to trace strains of Postcolonialism, dislocation, and the quest for freedom in Kincaid's four outstanding novels *Annie John, Lucy, Mr. Potter and See Now Then*.*

**Key Words:** *Dislocation, Postcolonialism, Psychoanalysis, Self and Other.*

The Caribbean literature has got its calypso on the readers. It has got the amalgamation of the various psychological sufferings and the deep feeling of colonialism and the perfect ecocritical description of the beauty of the West Indies, for these reasons, men of letters focused on the literary production of the West Indies. A definition by Alexander Street ProQuest library as:

The literature of the Caribbean is exceptional, both in language and subject. More than a million and a half Africans, along with many Indians and South Asians, were brought to the Caribbean between the 15th and 19th centuries. Today, their descendants are active in literature and the arts, producing literature with strong and direct ties to traditional African expressions. This literary connection, combined with the tales of survival, exile, resistance, endurance, and emigration to other parts of the Americas, makes for a body of work that is essential for the study of the Caribbean and the Black Diaspora-and indeed central for our understanding of the New World (Caribbean Literature).

In her book, *Jamaica Kincaid: A Literary Companion*, Sondgrass asserts that Mustafa Marroushi and other critics have focused on *Annie John* and *Lucy* in respect of being two coming of age novellas and the hatred of the British colonization. (70) Some critics focused on *Mr. Potter* as a unique experience of a man who has many sexual experiences and a completely different attitude towards life. Other critics focus on her last novel, *See Now Then*. The novel is dominated by Mrs. Sweet and her family. Mrs. Sweet, the heroine, is no longer receiving orders from her elders, she is a mature independent lady who decided her destiny and chose to spend her life with no other people. It can be easily said that the last novel she has written about seven years ago is an amalgamation of a long life experience combining America and Antigua plus some focus on the British educational system.

Many literary analyses describe Kincaid's works as some sort of biographies. Most of the names and the events listed in her novels confirm this fact. She is charged of writing psychological biographies

reflecting large bulk of her own life. She states these charges in her novel *See Now Then*: When her husband denies her creativity in writing and says that her novels are just mere autobiography of her life.

This paper will combine four different novels of Kincaid - *Annie John* (1985), *Lucy* (1990), *Mr. Potter* (2002), and her last novel written after one decade of no literary output, *See Now Then* (2013) - and will deal with three common themes in respect of the Caribbean literature in general and these of Kincaid in particular - post colonization, dislocation and the quest of freedom. These themes, in the scholars' opinion, dominate most of the literary output produced by the Caribbean men of letters.

Postcolonialism refers to an era or attitude relating to the period after the settlement of one country by another, or very broadly, after the 1960's, when many colonized countries gained their independence. In Kincaid's writing, one can read her hatred to colonization and see a big war against the British colonization of her homeland, Antigua. The Eurocentric culture and education dominated her life dramatically. She hates the British culture and the idea of being a colonized object like the land and the nature. In an interview with Kincaid titled "Jamaica Kincaid on Dialogue", she states her severe happiness because of Brexit. In her novella, *Annie John*, she mentioned colonialism for the first time: "of long-dead people who were the masters of our ancestors" (Kincaid, A J50). *Columbus in Chains*, the title of her fifth chapter in the same novella, reflects perfectly her thriving desire to take revenge from the colonizer in general. She is happy to reflect her psychological pain using her little Annie as a real mouthpiece telling the readers about her psychological pain. This psychological biographical novella reflects the inner feelings of the author which are repressed by her and thousands of West Indies people because of colonization effect.

In *Lucy* (1990), the second novella in this paper, post colonization experience is completely different from the one that is portrayed in her first novella, *Annie John*. It is known that *Lucy* is a continuation of *Annie John*, for Kincaid starts the novel from the end where *Annie John* stopped. As a matter of fact, *Lucy*, the leading character of her second novel *Lucy* did not feel the colonizer as Annie did. However, the experience of being a lady of color who works as an au pair in America for a wealthy family besides her abject poverty and the insistence of her family to travel and work in a different country made her feel a different type of post colonization which resembles exactly a self-imposed exile. She, of course, summons these tough experiences from the past education that magnifies the British educational system and the British Culture as well. In *Lucy*, the heroine who dominates the scene was colonized by her excessive love for sex. Some repression in her past made her fall into many sexual experiences.

In *Mr. Potter*, her third novel, Kincaid portrays a different type of post colonization. Mr. Potter, the taxi driver who earns his living by driving along the streets he knows and sees the graveyards which he will be buried in. He is doing his best to earn his living amid the difficult and narrow circumstances imposed upon him. His life is hard because of his illiteracy. In my opinion, Mr. Potter's poverty reflects the poverty of the colonized and Mr. Schweizeinger reflects the richness of the colonizer. The image of a poor helpless man reflects the helplessness of the colonized countries and their citizens who cannot face off their colonizer.

The theme of post colonization was highly depicted once more indirectly in her last novel, *See Now Then*. This novel is considered her masterpiece for she vented on herself. She managed to form a family a well-established one including the husband who is in charge of them. All of a sudden, she felt that the husband is no longer in love with her. He charged her all the time with failure in her literary career. She finally, got rid of him. The husband in this novel is the colonizer who is to protect and take care of the colonized. She made her heroine and her leading character, Mrs. Sweet, to revolt against the norms of the colonizer. It can be easily said that the colonizer is the husband who was forced to set her free at the end.

It can be said that the theme of post colonization has been interwoven directly and indirectly through the corresponding literature. It is pretty clear that each work of art has the theme of post colonization mingled with other themes like dislocation and the quest for freedom.

Another recurrent theme in Kincaid's works is the theme of dislocation. Dislocation is the feeling that a man does not belong to a certain place. It is a severe experience felt by some immigrants who left their countries or were forced to leave them. When a person is at odds with a new place, then he surely suffers some sort of dislocation. This dislocation can be easily seen in Kincaid's first novella, *Annie John*. The coming of age story starts from childhood till puberty. From that time on, Annie starts receiving commands from her mum. She is no longer in good terms with her mother. The dislocation experience starts to force her find friends from the school and spend a portion of time daily with them. The red girl and Gwen are two of the friends who accompanied her for a big portion of time during her puberty. The home becomes strange to her. She is faced by avalanche of orders from her mum. She is forced to stop playing with marbles. Her problem with the location reflects a big psychological problem. Changing school is another dislocation experience she has gone through. A new school, a new life, and of course a new dislocation experience shared in the feeling of dislocation. At the end of the novel, she felt sorrow of the major dislocation feeling in her life when her family decided to send her to study nursing in the United Kingdom. She, Annie, is going to face the colonizer of her homeland. The daffodil is a symbol of post colonization that will make her feel the experience of dislocation as a whole. It is an experience that can be read via the heroine's ideas and chat with her family members.

In *Lucy*, the continuation of *Annie John*, the feeling of dislocation was to the fullest in her first days in America. The big differences between America and Antigua make her think of her homeland. Seeing the elevator for the first time makes her feel some kind of dislocation. The ecological differences between America and Antigua equally make her feel homesick towards Antigua at the very beginning. The ecological differences came to nothing when she visited the other house of the family where they spend summer vacation. The other experiences of dislocation can be a resultant from leaving her sexual partner and deciding to go back to her motherland.

*Mr. Potter* has no big feeling of dislocation. The little girl is the omniscient narrator who tells the reader everything about Mr. Potter and his life. The location can be a crisis in one situation and can be a source of happiness and relaxation in another.

As a matter of fact, *See Now Then*, is a completely good example for painful psychological experiences. It can be said that there is no problem with location at all whether in the place where they live or the surroundings. Kincaid described the beauty of the water stream closer to the Shirley Jackson house where they live "Mrs. Sweet could look down on the roaring water of the Paran River ...all part of the Green Mountain Range" (Kincaid SNT 3).

The most notable theme is her quest for freedom. It can be argued that the whole Caribbean literary works are considered typographical cases for the quest of freedom. Due to colonization and the upper hands of the British post colonization, most of the works tell the reader that they seek freedom. The quest for freedom can be seen via different scenes in her works.

Annie, the leading character of the novella, *Annie John*, is seeking her freedom from the newly imposed fetters of her mother. She cannot be subject to a "to do list" of orders daily said to her. She wants to feel herself. Her mother wants her to be a replica of her while Annie refuses greatly this kind of domination. Her early lesbian experience with one of her friends at school reflects some kind of freedom searching. She feels herself as an adult who should free herself from her mother's fetters. Her decision to travel to England to study nursery is another sign for her quest for freedom.

In *Lucy*, the novella opens with her first day as a free being. She is stepping in a new river. She is different now. She is going to be away from the Antiguans. Her first experience as an au pair helps her shape a new perspective of life under American eyes. Unfortunately, many of the Americans see the Caribbean girls as slaves. They have the very same color of the Afro-American ones. Another catastrophe happens in America for au pair students who have lots of responsibilities towards a family of four girls. She

should take care of them. She starts to find friends and to enjoy some freedom outside the walls of the hosting family. Her main quest for freedom, it can be deduced, is her trail to satisfy her sexual freedom. She made many sexual relationships with many sex partners to get rid of the fetters of her mother in Antigua. Her first sexual experience named "The Tongue" was depicted by Kincaid in one full chapter. Her repression in Antigua came to myriad sexual experiences with different men in different age groups. Strangely, she did not mention love. She knows well that love is also a big fetter that can make her life upside down.

In *Mr. Potter*, the third novel under discussion, the reader discovers the easy life that Mr. Potter lives. He moves here and there freely. He has many love affairs with different women. He has free children with many of them. Mr. Potter's earnings are not that big, but he enjoys his job. He does not want to leave his employer or be under the restraints of a new job. He is meant to be free in that novel. Here, Kincaid's love for her dad whose name is Richardson Potter, made her give up her feministic attitude and made Mr. Potter the hero of the novel and named the novel after his name. His quest for freedom is that of being a footloose and fancy free. His quest for freedom is also latent in his so many sexual experiences.

*See Now Then* is considered the best work that shows freedom searching. It can be a very good search for freedom of a husband who does not understand his family, especially his wife. Asking for divorce is a quest for freedom. Her husband's view of her novels always made her angry.

Of a paramount importance is her naming of the novel. She and her family, as she said, move easily from the past to the future and from the future to the past and so on. This type of movement is a quest for freedom. Whenever one wants to free oneself, he/she uses selective memories from the past to help him / her vent on himself / herself in the present. The heroine suffers from Lacanian *self - other* dichotomy or it a clear instance of psychoanalytical repression that can easily be discovered in her novels.

The four novels have in common some kind of similarity in respect of post colonization, dislocation and the quest for freedom. It can be deduced that *Lucy* and *Annie John* have focused on the postcolonial experiences more than *Mr. Potter* and *See Now Then*. The sense of dislocation can more highly be noticed in *Lucy* than her other novels with varying meaning. The quest for freedom has truly controlled her *Annie John, Lucy, Mr. Potter and See Now Then*. In each novel, the quest for freedom was a psychological experience and it differs from one leading character to the other. In the first novel, it was the maternal fetters which controlled her freedom. In *Lucy*, she managed to get rid of her fetters but she is back again to these fetters. Mr. Potter, the leading character who is seen by the eyes of the omniscient narrator is a free man and a happy go lucky one. He enjoys his life and the different sexual experiences. It can be deduced that Kincaid created her heroines unfree while creating her hero as free. The psychological fetters upon her made her to depict her leading characters, the female ones especially, as enslaved ones.

On the whole, the novelist has succeeded in portraying the real strains / notions of post colonization, dislocation, and quest for freedom in her novels.

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