CHAPTER – 2

CONSIDERING WOMAN

Adolescents and Mothers in the works of Olive Senior & Jamaica Kincaid.
CONSIDERING WOMAN: ADOLESCENTS AND MOTHERS IN THE WORKS OF OLIVE SENIOR AND JAMAICA KINCAID.

A. EX-ISLE - Redefining Caribbean Existence Through Literature.

In a region made ominously intelligible because of systems of domination, in which origins are obscured or degenerate into self-serving fictions, traumatised by dependency, the quest for self-formation and redefinition is the only valid imaginative response of the writers of the Caribbean. Master Prospero and slave Caliban, Robinson Crusoe and Man Friday - the confrontation between the castaway subject and the cast-out other in the Caribbean makes these universal images of the divided self, the dissociated sensibility, more acute and pervasive.

The Caribbean writer is haunted by the darker implications of these polarities. His imagination is constantly drawn to these contrastive mental spaces, which symbolically reflect the relationship between power and the promise of its subversion. The individual artist’s unsettling focus on these precarious dichotomies ultimately constitutes a tradition built around redefining the subject, reacting against cultural and psychological estrangement, and in its most visionary manifestation, creating a poetics of a fissured, constantly changing space. Here, the task of consciousness becomes necessary in a world that is the product of others’ dreams, where systems of knowledge and significance are enforced in order to produce docility, constraint and helplessness. The traditional worldview was the
one in which European rulers regarded their colonial possessions as outposts on the periphery of their world - the white, rich and technologically powerful metropolis of Europe and North America. According to the traditional view, ex-colonial outputs such as those in the Caribbean still survive and function, from day to day, largely because of their dependent links on former imperial centres. In reversing this global structure of white centers surrounded mainly by non-white colonial outposts, many West Indian writers, notable among them being George Lamming, went on to claim that these centres had now themselves become outposts on the frontiers of other cultures, one of which had its centre in the Caribbean.

By reversing the polarities, Lamming was reflecting his own experience and that of many other writers from the Caribbean. Between 1946 and 1958 the BBC programme Caribbean Voices acted as a catalyst for the extraordinary explosion of talent which was to enrich world literature, as well as forcing metropolitan writers to listen to new viewpoints and to rethink established and accepted categories of thought.

In 1953 the Texan historian Walter Prescott Webb had published The Great Frontier, in which he put forward the 'boom' hypothesis of modern history, arguing that the dynamism of Western Europe, coupled with the unlimited availability of free land, created a four-hundred-year boom, which conditioned the development of the institutions and attitudes of the colonies. That boom is now shown to be over, and the expanding frontier has been replaced by a contracting frontier, whereby the flow of
ideas is reversed and the views and values of those marginalised for centuries, those from the periphery - the ex-colonial powers - impinge on and subtly undermine and change those of the erstwhile colonizers. A visible sign of this contraction has been the presence of writers like Claude McKay, that great early figure of the Caribbean diaspora, in the imperial capitals.

Perhaps because of a continuing unquestioned assumption that Europe is the origin of discourse and the colonies merely the branches growing out from that source, it seems the more familiar task for critics to see the English tradition as central. The post-colonial literatures, when looked at from within their own perspectives, however, do not justify such assumptions.

Despite Caliban’s transformation by New World writers such as Frantz Fanon, Aime Cesaire, George Lamming, CLR James and Wilson Harris to list a few, Caliban remains an ambiguous symbol for the self-determination of the colonised. The claiming of Caliban was a necessary ideological step at a specific historical moment, but one could argue that the moment has now passed.

Active self-formation or ‘subjectification’, a major concern of modern critical theory is a phenomenon, which occurs with obsessive frequency in Caribbean writing. Establishing a new authority or authorship is one of those vital continuities in Caribbean literature that has created the possibility of a redistribution of discourse, of re-
presenting self. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. explains that, "Unlike almost every other literary tradition, the Afro-American literary tradition was generated as a response to allegations that its authors did not and could not, create 'literature'". Many writers have faced the problem of how to dismantle the 'master's house', when the 'master's' tools are apparently the only ones available, and they have confronted it in a variety of ingenious ways.

The view of the psyche as a constantly shifting site where the known or the knowable tentatively emerges from the world of flux, of latent possibilities, points to the special manifestation of self-definition in the Caribbean imagination. For instance, the Martinican novelist Edouard Glissant and the Guyanese novelist Wilson Harris, independently of each other, focus on the question of self-formation, the process of 'becoming' in terms of images of space, threatened but constantly reasserting itself. In Harris's imagination,

"Two oceans, symbolic and real, impinge on modern Guyana. The Atlantic has tested the coastland people for generations. They have fought a long battle with the sea to maintain their homes. The vast interior at their back is another, equally complex, ocean that rises into a 'sounding cliff' or majestic waterfall within rainforest, savannah, rock, river."
For Glissant, the dialectic between stable and unstable, real and unreal, voiced and unvoiced is equally inscribed in Caribbean space: "The sea is always an envelope, something extra, that which is outside everything and which forms a definite border, but which has a shaping and defining power at the same time.... In this place of acceptance and denial, this line of trees contains the essentials of wisdom, it teaches moderation and at the same time inspires audacity."  

It is precisely this dialectic between said and not only unsaid but ‘unsayable’ that dictates theme, technique and ideological orientation for the Caribbean writer. Some writers focus on the known and the real as an exclusive area of concern and who endeavour to explain all structures as part of a rational knowable order. For some other writers, the world exists prior to and independent of the subject; they therefore tend to concentrate on that area of experience, which exceeds explanation, on the deconstruction of the sovereign subject. Such writers attempt to show that the constructive subject’s grasp of the world is inadequate, and that there is always an irreducible unknown, a Derridean difference, those ‘aporias’, which constantly resist systematic interpretation.

Thus, in the first instance, the structuring ego longs for a world of alternative stable meanings and of fixed values. The second provides a radical critique of the privileged subject, where the individual subject is simply the site, the threshold where collective subject finds articulation, where private and public, individual and group interact. The apotheosis of the subject and decentered subject, the poetics of rupture and
relation’, are the determining factors in a Caribbean literary tradition. The post-modernist dismantling of the subject and insistence on the relation between humanity and cosmos provides the critical tools for examining the direction taken by creative imagination.

Caribbean writing was thus seen as preoccupied with the issue of incompleteness and as a creative rupture with the petrified and alienated self of the colonial world. Perhaps this is what Glissant meant when he pointed to the ‘lived modernity’ of the Caribbean. In Le discours antillais he examines the urgency with which the question of the problematics of the subject and the discourse of otherness is posed.

“We need to develop a poetics of the ‘subject,’ if only because we have too long been ‘objectified’ or rather, ‘objected to’. The text must for us (in our lived experience) be destabilized because it must belong to a shared reality and it is perhaps at this point that we actually relate to those ideas that emerged elsewhere. The author must be demythified, certainly, because he must be integrated into a common resolve. The ‘collective we’ becomes the site for the generative system and the true subject.”

The demystification of the author as authoritarian voice is not a gratuitous devaluation of human agency, but rather a refocussing of attention on the inescapable shaping force of otherness. Similarly,
Harris's view of structuralism is critical of its belief that all structures can be rationally defined, although he approves of its insistence on looking beneath the surface.

Both Harris and Glissant indicate in their assertion of the links between humanity and cosmos, in their demythification of omniscience and articulacy, the ways in which issues that have long preoccupied the Caribbean writer are now a major philosophical issue in post-modernist thought. In this way, the radical scepticism of post-modernism, overlaps with the creative intuition of Caribbean writing.

So when one looks at history, its movement, and the concepts with which one defines historical events, one realises that perception depends on the defining centre of power or the re-defining centre of resistance.

In the various readings and rewritings of the Prospero, Caliban and Ariel relationship in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, we can trace the Caribbean male writer's preoccupation with the divided sensibility and gradual redefinition of the subject on the imaginary level. This imaginative concern with the subject in the Caribbean is fundamental to the phenomenal reality of the text. It is responsible for the system of imagery in West Indian literature whose centre is the body. The body is an endlessly suggestive sign through which the process of 'subjectification' is mediated and expressed. The use of corporeal imagery as an index to the process of self-formation is extensive in Caribbean literature, and indicates the tensions that underlie the process.
of self-characterisation, of the recuperation of the self, as it were, in the individual imagination.

For instance, Frantz Fanon attempts to rewrite the body of colonised man, creating a new subject from the dismemberment and castration inflicted by the coloniser's destructive gaze, a constantly recurring theme in Cesaire's writing, where the body has the last word. In his epic poem Cahier d'un retour au pays natal, Cesaire imagines the journey of the disembodied subject across the estranging waters and the eventual reintegration of the body with the 'pays natal.' Cesaire's journey is not to a prelapsarian Eden, but a fallen world, a defiled body. His is a voyage beyond illusion, as

"All that ever was dismembered
In me has been dismembered
All that even was mutilated
In me has been mutilated..."6

In The Wretched of the Earth, Fanon equates a reanimated body with the liberated voice of the revolutionary intellectual: "It is a vigorous style, alive with rhythms, struck through and through with bursting life.... The new movement gives rise to a new rhythm of life and to forgotten muscular tensions, and develops the imagination."7 Fanon's images of verbal muscularity have found a resonance in most Caribbean writing.
Columbus’ arrival in the so-called New World had given rise to a number of divergent and sometimes debatable interpretations. However, there remains the indisputable fact that the Genoese sailor’s crossing of the Atlantic shaped the societies that make up today’s American continent, among others the Caribbean. It determined the racially kaleidoscopic nature of its population and, more importantly, triggered off a vast, wide-ranging and often painful migratory phenomenon which in turn led to an almost ‘infinite rehearsal’ to use Wilson Harris’s by now famous phrase, of the initial collision between two worlds. Whether forcible or voluntary, displacements and encounters with otherness have always been at the very heart of the Caribbean condition.

If Columbus is the man who has come to stand symbolically as the prime catalyst of the most seminal changes in Caribbean history, he is also sometimes regarded, in a very ambiguous way, as having a lot in common with the displaced humans that were to people the Caribbean islands as a result of his voyages and conquests. In an article entitled ‘The Caribbean Writer and Exile’ in which he highlights the centrality of the exilic experience in contemporary Caribbean literature and re-assesses early Caribbean history from the point of view of the colonized, Jan Carew portrays Columbus as “‘a schizoid being’, a Janus astride two worlds, one medieval the other of the Renaissance”, a kind of forerunner of the archetypical Caribbean migrant: “Columbus led an early life that was very similar to the one that future Caribbean artists, vagabounds, sailors, writers and immigrants would lead centuries later.... His whole life...was...a journey into new illusions.” Even if this admittedly
arguable point requires some qualifications, the ambivalence of Columbus’ role as both alienating agent and, eventually, alienated subject as - his well known later history indicates\(^{10}\) - somehow prefigures the duality of Caribbean experience that has so often inspired the best literature from the area.\(^{11}\)

Exploring the Caribbean oral tradition is not just a plunge into the past, back to the times when the African slaves sang their songs while working in the fields, and tunes and words were handed down from one generation to the next. Contemporary Caribbean poetry forces into recognition, the fact that modern culture in the widest sense of the word, is in good part oral and visual. It is perhaps less surprising here than elsewhere that the spoken word should have come back on the written one with such force and pervasiveness, almost with a vengeance. In the Caribbean, the oral tradition was not lost in the mists of time, but rather lay dormant after a not-too-distant past. The vitality and strength of the oral tradition in Caribbean verse emerges from the numerous ballads; and its peculiar clearly modulated voices spring from a very stimulating tension between a standard (BBC) English and the creolised language of the ordinary people, the latter being close to the former yet different in its immediacy and ever changing vitality. Folklore thus plays a very important part in telling of the West Indian standpoint.

Anansi, the spider trickster of West African origin is perhaps the most popular hero in Caribbean folklore. Anansi’s ability to succeed, through trickery and ingenuity, despite human frailties and his status as an
underdog, appealed to the slaves who were also underdogs, and who therefore relied on their wits rather than physical force to confront their white oppressors.

B. COLONIAL EVE... and the aftermath.

Women in pre and post-colonial W. Indies.

The work of a writer exists as a part of the historical process and yet simultaneously encodes history within itself. It can be separated by time and place from its genesis, yet present to the reader, an open text that, by its inherent structure, invites more than one interpretation. In many ways, the linguistic division of the Caribbean, which has its roots in the area’s colonial past, is an arbitrary one, as the cultural heritage of many of the islands draws on a variety of common factors, whatever the official lingua franca. These include the African heritage, a history of slavery, indentured labour system from India and also the usage of an ironic mode of communication, a ‘double-talk’ which, like the picong tradition, could effect to mean one thing but in fact suggest quite the opposite.

Caribbean women writers have been central from the outset in exploring and subverting both the limitations and the potentialities of these inherited languages. In fact, the need to subvert the power of dominant language whether of imperial power or the dominance of the black male has always been central in Caribbean women’s writing. One such writer is Dionne Brand, who was born in Trinidad in 1953, and emigrated in 1970 to Canada, where she still lives. She freely uses
Creole or Caribbean forms of speech and expression, despite any difficulties that they may pose to a non-Caribbean audience. The title of her collection of poems *No Language is Neutral* strongly reiterates her belief in the power of ideology to influence language and shape the world.

This distinctive standpoint is but a rearticulation of a consciousness that already existed more than a hundred years earlier. In fact, during the period of resistance to the ideologies of slavery, a number of stories by escaped slaves were published. Notable among these slaves was Mary Prince, the earliest known woman-writer from the English speaking Caribbean. Her account *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave* published in 1831 was illuminating, not only for its depiction of the harsh conditions of slavery, but also for the strength, fortitude and independence with which this first black woman writer resisted what Ziggi Alexander has called her ‘physical and psychological degradation’. As one of the few surviving slave accounts from the British Caribbean, Prince’s autobiographical narrative is an important milestone in the literary history of the region, as well as a potent symbol for all those women writers who followed her.

Succeeding women writers like Mary Seacole, Pamela Smith and Clarine Stephenson also portrayed in unconventional style, the domination of their colonial world by white men, simultaneously presenting overt observations which acted as a counter discourse to the nineteenth century bourgeois ideology of where a women’s place ought to
be, and how her behaviour should conform to patriarchal dictats. Notable among West Indian women writers in the early twentieth century are two major Jamaican poets, Una Marson and Louise Bennett.

On the whole, the voice of the contemporary West Indian woman was yet to be established at that time in the literature of the region. Very few women indeed wrote for a living, and the paucity of writers is perhaps a good explanation for the absence of a tradition of women’s writing in the sense in which it exists today. In A Readers Guide to West Indian and Black British Literature the authors however acknowledge the recent attempts by the women to project themselves in the written literature of the region. Although there is no well-established tradition of West Indian women writers, there have been a few significant and inspiring examples such as Bennett and Marson who were active in the 1930s. Both of them are Jamaican poets in whose work the preoccupation with the woman’s situation is pervasive and well integrated with racial and cultural themes.

During the mid-nineteenth century, there was perhaps no major woman writer dominating the scene, but the increasing variety and relevance in women’s voices was nevertheless apparent. The scene was slightly different in the late 70s and early 80s. Jamaica Woman, an anthology of poems first edited by Pamela Mordecai and Mervyn Morris in 1980, is a case in point, showing this presence in the Jamaican poetical arena. In the preface, the editors justify their choice by declaring that
many of the new Jamaican poems they had seen and liked were by women.

The multiple concerns of gender, race, class, language and colonialism are not absent from the poems included in this anthology; in some poems the issues are treated one at a time, but more often they seem to overlap out of necessity, and even the more private poems end up by suggesting universal and social meanings. With a few beautiful images, the poetic vision retrieves places and people, establishing an idea of community that goes beyond political commitment.

Subject to the pressures and demands of the post-colonial world, struggling for a historical identity, at a crossroads of cultures, the poets direct their passionate attention to the actual conditions of the Caribbean, but also demand the freedom to go beyond this necessary pattern, establishing their personal visions, refusing to be fitted into convenient literary categories.
C. WORKING MIRACLES - Women as child bearers and rearers in the Caribbean.

Popular perceptions of Caribbean women as being strong, assertive, independent, self-reliant matriarchs are being constantly challenged by growing evidence of the structural and ideological factors which hinder Caribbean women’s achievement of social and political advancement. Gender-based division of labour within and outside the household, the dual burden of reproduction and production borne by women, and gender ideology which favours men are some of the factors often cited as inhibiting Caribbean women’s potential for advancement. Caribbean women do exercise considerable power and authority through their domestic and maternal roles, in the process acquiring a measure of autonomy, which sets them apart from their sisters in the developing world. To a large extent legal impediments to their participation in society have been dismantled, although several areas still merit reform. But, from an overall perspective, it cannot be denied that, in the Caribbean, as in so many other parts of the world, it is a man’s world.

Present economic crises in the region, occasioned by recessions in the international economic system, and structural adjustment efforts of individual Caribbean territories, have done much to illustrate and intensify the weak position of Caribbean women, particularly the poorest
among them. Thus, the attempt by women themselves, be they writers, economists or social workers, to provide a comprehensive overview of available literature from the social sciences, the humanities, the creative arts and folk tales, would be supportive of the movement which aims to facilitate an understanding of the realities of the lives of the Caribbean women.

Because it is grounded in a specific and comprehensive data set and is supported by a wide range of other sources, this approach serves to shed a more cohesive light on the issues affecting Caribbean women. The particular historical heritage of the Caribbean has been instrumental in forging the framework within which Caribbean women have functioned. The history of women in this region is a history of women in developing strategies and techniques to defy a system that took their submission for granted. The variety of family forms, for example, in which women developed relationships with their men, their children and other relatives, represents a consistent refusal to be encompassed in the simple nuclear family form which was supposed to be universal. The tradition of economic autonomy amongst women has never been abandoned. Rather, the contemporary Caribbean woman seeks to strengthen this autonomy, though - and this is a point often overlooked - in the context of a relationship of interdependence with her man.

The Caribbean woman has used techniques similar to those used by men to confront adverse situations. But she has also used techniques peculiar to her state of being a woman. She has refused to cede her
responsibility for maintaining herself and her household, even in the presence of a male partner; she has transformed educational opportunities into opportunities for skills enhancement and self-advancement; by doing so, she has reserved the right to speak out.

The problems of survival, of maintaining families, of seeking sources of livelihood are not usually female-centric problems. Indeed, in many societies, these are regarded as largely male responsibilities. One sees that the main expectation of the male in many Caribbean households and families is that he should function as provider. "The man is expected to work and to earn for his family; his status within the family hinges on how adequately he provides.... The man’s earner role is crucial because it links the work and family worlds, in which the man plays two of the most important roles in his life." Yet, it is frequently the Caribbean woman who ends up playing the breadwinner role.

Despite the idealized image of male-female roles that persists, the Caribbean woman generally accepts work as her lot. From childhood, most girls are groomed into assuming domestic responsibilities, including care of the home and younger siblings while the mother labours.

The fact that society distinguishes between men’s work and women’s work is evident from the occupational structure of the region. Caribbean women themselves are socialized to choose training and education which would prepare them for traditional ‘female’ occupations. Attitudes of both men and women regarding the sexual division of labour
are probably most pronounced in the domestic sphere and in the traditional farming sector.

Gender was the significant factor in determining the work assignments in the period before European settlement when the role of Caribbean women as worker-mother was first established. The indigenous population of Arawak and Carib had clear-cut divisions of labour in which women played a significant role outside childbearing and domestic duties.

Although the aboriginal population of the Caribbean islands were virtually exterminated in the century or so following the European conquest starting in the late fifteenth century, those remaining were absorbed into the process of creolization by which new societies were being rapidly created from an amalgam of European, African and aborigine elements. The literature shows that the indigenous population passed on to the newcomers, their knowledge and skills derived from centuries of exploration of the lands and seas around them; such cultural transmission would be expected to include the sexual divisions associated with various tasks. These traditions are evidently still carried on today by the small populations of indigenous people remaining in St. Vincent, Trinidad and Guyana.

Under the system of plantation slavery around which Caribbean societies were organised from the mid-seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries, gender roles were modified by race and class. Colonial society
was stratified into white, brown and black, which corresponded to the social and economic power structure.

European females on the plantations were restricted to conjugal and maternal roles since they had an enormous number of black domestic slaves at their disposal to take care of child-rearing and domestic duties.

In the middle of the colour-class system were the mulatto or coloured women, born of miscegenation between the races. Mulattos were regarded as useless for plantation labour and were therefore given the higher status jobs—usually inside the plantation houses. Many were freed by their fathers, contributing to the growing ‘free coloured’ population of these territories. Mulatto women were able to engage in various activities which enhanced their personal power and independence. Their spheres of influence included the homes of white men, where they frequently functioned as concubines, euphemistically called ‘housekeepers’. Such women often benefited from the largesse of the white men who were their fathers, who might free them and give them small legacies, and from the white men who were their keepers, who might also provide them with the means of establishing themselves, usually as petty proprietors.

Coloured women established a tradition of being tavern- and hotel-keepers, ‘doctresses’ or healers, and many, such as Mary Seacole of Jamaica and Rachel Pringle of Barbados, became noted or notorious enough to be cited in the records of their times. In the post-emancipation
period, they along with poor white women functioned as teachers, owners of small plantations and petty proprietors of various business enterprises such as hotels, schools or dressmaking establishments.

At the bottom of the economic and social system were the black slave women. Although some were engaged in domestic labour, and others in petty trading, the majority worked as unskilled labourers on sugar plantations, the hardest work of all. Field slaves were grouped according to strength and endurance, not according to sex. The evidence so far shows that women contributed the largest proportion of field slaves.

Historian Elsa Goveia in her study of the Leewards noted of field slaves, "No other group...was so completely subject to the harsh necessity of slavery as an industrial system. The life of the ordinary slave was characterised by coercion and dependence. The gangs of field slaves were worked for long hours under discipline of the whip."14

A female slave labourer would have found it difficult to move upwards in the slave hierarchy since she was excluded from jobs which developed the technical and artisanal skills associated with sugar production. While enslaved women were relegated to field and domestic tasks, their men had a much wider range of occupational choices and access to skills.
After the slaves were freed in the 1830s, the options open to both men and women were: to continue to labour on the plantations for wages; to establish themselves as peasant proprietors or to hire themselves out in the towns, mainly in domestic service. Thus men and women on the whole, continued to labour for others, mainly at hard manual tasks. In very few cases were black males economically able to become sole breadwinners and providers for their families.

It was in the immediate post-emancipation period that the image of the independent black female became full-blown. Some of the newly freed women parlayed the skills they had learnt during slavery as vendors of farm produce. However most women continued to work for wages on the land.

Despite the structural and institutional handicaps, women, and black women especially, came to establish a reputation for themselves as providers and managers of their own affairs. Contemporary visitors to the Caribbean repeatedly recorded their impressions of black women as the workers’ of these societies and of their independent, resilient attitudes.

The ending of slave labour brought new elements into the racial and social matrix of these societies. With emancipation approaching, and the planters’ fears of losing control of their labour force, the British government imported into the Caribbean territories indentured workers from India, China and Africa. The bulk of the indentured immigrants
were Indian males, who became agricultural labourers. The smaller number of Indian women who did come, were also expected to labour in the fields, though, like the black women they replaced, they were paid considerably less than men. As the Indians became better off and accumulated enough to buy their own land, more and more of their women withdrew from estate labour.

Up to the middle of this century, wage labour for women continued to be mainly back-breaking, exploitative drudgery. It is perhaps the creative artists who have been most perceptive of this aspect of the female role. Writers have celebrated them in novels, and female manual labourers have also been immortalized in poetic imagery, as in George Campbell's 'History makers' (1981):

*Women stone breakers*

*Hammer and rocks*

*Tired child makers*

*Haphazard frocks.*

*Strong thigh*

*Rigid head*

*Bent nigh*

*Hard white piles*

*Of stone*

*Under hot sky*

*In the gully bed.*15
Virtually all Caribbean women might perceive themselves as working, but only some are officially categorized as 'workers.' Women who go out to a job perform a role that is visible and quantifiable. But these represent only a portion of working women, and their labour a portion of women's work. In her daily round of activities, a woman often has to fulfil different roles associated with domestic, maternal and economic demands of her existence. Although a significant portion of the lives of women is devoted to such activities, considerable confusion exists as to what exactly should be classified as 'women's work.'

No such problem is associated with men's work since men and work are regarded as two sides of an equation: a man's work is one of the things by which he is judged, and certainly one of the most significant things by which he judges himself. A man's work is one of the most important parts of his social identity.

Female independence in this period was reinforced by the fact that it was on the women left at home that the burden of maintaining the household and caring for the children fell, arrangements which became permanent when desertion occurred, or when the man died overseas, a frequent situation given the hazardous working conditions. Where the men did remit earnings, it was the women who exercised the responsibility of investing it in land and other assets and of maintaining them. Income-earning activity is important to women, because it is bound up with a sense of self. Even though many women are engaged exclusively in home-based work, few seem to be content to be entirely
supported by others. The desire for economic independence is a strong characteristic of the Caribbean woman and a vital component of her self-image.

This need for personal income applies even to married women, especially since it is observed that “The man’s authority in the relationship varies directly with the adequacy of his contribution and with the degree of her dependence on him as her sole source of livelihood.”

Further, virtually all employed women, regardless of their status or income level, or their ability to tap other sources of income, saw their wage work as their main source of support. Having their own money, they said, made them feel good, because they did not have to beg a man any more.

Part of the woman’s emphasis on her personal financial independence stems from her negative perceptions of male performance and behaviour and attendant risks to the ‘dependent’ woman, particularly where children are involved. It is extremely significant that Caribbean women frequently assert, “my children are my responsibility.” Children generally are perceived not as joint heirs in a family situation but as ultimately the responsibility of their mothers.

Most Caribbean women are faced with problems related to the survival of their households and with developing strategies for coping.
As Victoria Durant-Gonzalez expresses it, "In the English-speaking Caribbean, an overwhelming majority of the female population is in charge of producing, providing, controlling or managing those resources essential to meeting daily needs." Their "sources of livelihood" extend far beyond conventional concepts of 'work' and the 'labour force'. Women's strategies for survival or 'making do' also include self-employment, and other sources like kin and friendship networks, pooling resources in the family home, support from adult working children and institutional benefits.

'Making do' expresses a social phenomenon which is widely accepted: that it is a fundamental role of poor women to make do with what they have or, better still, 'make something from nothing' in order to maintain their families. At its simplest level, 'making do' involves cutting and carving and contriving, being resourceful in using whatever is available to maximize its utility to oneself and family-the challenge to poor women everywhere. In some cases, 'making do' represents personal denial and sacrifice.

Lorna Goodison's poem 'My Mother' is quoted here because it describes so graphically a familiar Caribbean role model: the woman as miracle worker, an adept at making something from nothing.

*She could work miracles, she would make a garment*

*from a square of cloth in a span that defied time. Or feed twenty people on a*
stew made from fallen from-the-head cabbage
leaves and a carrot and a

Cho-cho and a palmful of meat.

F. HER TRUE TRUE NAME\textsuperscript{21} - Portrayal of the multifaceted West Indian Woman.

In the context of post-colonial and feminist struggles, women writing in the third world countries take on a new role, one which does not by the mere act of writing, alienate the author from feminist issues present at the core of any articulation. Whereas the notion that simply being a woman is sufficient ground to assume an oppositional stance is naïve to the extreme, yet the various thought processes which occur in a woman’s mind and the way she expresses these, form by themselves, a resistance to main/male stream texts.

It was in the 1950s that Caribbean literature first began to be recognised internationally. With the publication of a number of nationalist novels by male writers that won international acclaim, critics began to refer to a West Indian literary Renaissance. Little attention was given, however, to a number of significant works by women writers who, also affected by the social and political changes in the region, attempted to define their roles within the context of political independence from colonial rule.

In societies that have evolved structures of power and where social behaviour is arbitrarily organised according to an imposed code,
possible to detect images of isolation peripheral to the main action. Examples from history as well as from literature, from the Old World as well as from the New and Third Worlds, from ancient times as well as from the contemporary, are rife with the half-oblscured and shadowy image of a woman or a girl, real or fictional, but nevertheless an unspoken challenge to the patriarchal code.

In this context childhood and adolescence play a crucial part in shaping children for the role they would later assume in such societies. As Joyce Justus in a study in Dominica has remarked, "... at that age while boys are permitted, and expected, to continue to be 'babies' and are allowed to play, girls are confined to the home and learn women's work, first by imitation, later by deliberate instruction." The girl child identifies herself with the mother, and are groomed to behave and select courses of study that are in keeping with the perceptions of the idealized feminine image.

Contemporary West Indian women writers have been, to a large extent, both liberative and innovative in their portrayal of the multi-faceted woman of the Caribbean cornucopia. In predominantly patriarchal social structures, where androcentric ideologies have influenced both fictional and critical output, women writers, through their ebullient and 'unorthodox' styles have been able to subvert the misconceptions inherent in prevalent 'malestream' texts.
A recognition of the falsifying metaphysical nature of gender identities, and biases of dichotomy between male and female is essential, in order that the writer authentically as well as aesthetically portray the psyche of the female protagonist.

In fact Jean Rhys, a white Creole born in Dominica in 1890, and whose works also cover the early and mid 20th century, illustrates the extent to which the conflicts of the island community in terms of race, colour, sex and religion are predominant; frequently the heroines of her novels are torn between a lost childhood on a lush tropical island and the alienation of existence in a northern clime; similarly many of her protagonists exist on the edges of communities, black or white, not belonging to either.

Rhys, always something of an enigma in the Caribbean literary tradition, constantly navigated a world in which it was “not just the difference between heat, cold, light, darkness; purple, gray. But a difference in the way I was frightened and the way I was happy.” This attempt to portray different ways of feeling and perception, and to move beyond the essentially limited and limiting labels cast upon her by her gender, race and colonial background, are recurrent themes. They come to a mature realization in Wide Sargasso Sea, in which she locates her heroine, Antoinette Cosway, within the slave history of the Caribbean. Rhys’ works anticipate the coming of later writers, and she is without doubt a literary mother to many contemporary writers from the region such as Jamaica Kincaid and Olive Senior.
What is evident here is an awareness of and attention to a special sense of inclusive, fluid diversity in Caribbean writing by women. Balutansky’s review of Her True True Name makes the point that there can never be one single ‘authentic’ Caribbean voice, female or otherwise, and generalizations about Caribbean female identity must recognize the ‘centrality of diversity’. Like other scholars, she calls attention to the variety of voices and styles in literature by women of the region, women who “may share a common history of colonialism, and many other experiences, but the interplay of these various heritages creates a new turn”24 in the way they each experience their world.

Sue Greene in a report25 admits that Caribbean women’s writing defies easy definition of any kind. Pamela Mordecai’s ‘prismatic form’, an exciting concept she has been refining for some time, speaks to the type of inclusiveness described above. For Mordecai, “Prismatic consciousness is the disposition to perceive and construe experience in terms of (sometimes unresolved) pluralities; the impulse to pluralities (usually) restrained by a manner of knowing essentially linear”26 as she explains in her forward to Davies and Fido’s Out of the Kumbla. Mordecai feels that such a refraction of experience and perception, one that pays attention to the multifaceted nature of perception, is an important feature of Caribbean women’s writing, although it owes much to the reality of syncretism, which characterizes Caribbean societies.

Thus, the fascinating way women writers slide across codes and registers of language is one aspect of this many-sided vision.
E. OUT OF THE KUMBLA²⁷ - Symbolism / Feminism in the works of West Indian women writers.

The relation between fiction and history in a particular area at a particular time is and can be seen as a continuum. Thus women's life-writing, especially when it deals with childhood, adolescence and growing up, might be thought to belong in realms far removed from history, that record of public events and celebration of nation building. The domestic, the intimate, the youthful and especially the feminine are not what used to pass unchallenged as history. In fact, women did not figure in historiography in any significant way until feminists began to insist on their inclusion.

The consequences of such a massive reorientation are beginning to manifest themselves, and not only in a history that is radically different because of the inclusion of women in it, but also a cultural analysis that is radically different because the inclusion of women in it involves a crucial deconstruction of what being West Indian has meant. Such a process of deconstruction reveals that ways in which the promotion of that mythic national essence depends on rendering women invisible and silent as its 'Other', its metaphorical underside.

More writers are now aware and conscious of the fact that a variety of relationships exists within the text, surrounding its birth and inception. Angela Carter, English novelist, dramatist and critic says that she tries to think on her feet when she writes fiction, and attempts to present a
number of propositions in a variety of different ways, and tries to leave the readers to construct their own fiction for themselves from the elements of her fiction. This new consciousness on the part of the writer, coupled with an acceptance of the fragmentary nature of the text, involves a more sophisticated response from the reader.

Where the emphasis initially lay on women's growing awareness of their position in society, it has now shifted towards studying the repressed female elements in texts, and analysing how the symbolic and linguistic order was disturbed by a specifically female style of writing. Certain areas have been left relatively unexplored, mainly because they were not considered important in terms of prevailing critical opinion. One such neglected area has been the process of creativity as it concerns women writers. The legitimate connections between the environment in which a work is created, the finished product and the specific factors that affect women need to be considered; as also the need to explore the relationship between creativity and critics, noting particularly the constrains imposed by any literary canon. Modern women writers explore the relationship between subjectivity and language, and address the question as to how ethnic, Third-World and post-colonial women make language (which is patriarchal and the coloniser's tool) serve their own subjectivity. The need to subvert the power of the dominant language (whether of ex-slave-master or imperial power) has always been central to Caribbean women's writing.
Olive Senior and Jamaica Kincaid have established that there is to some degree, an evolution in their works that is specific to women, overtly stressing their belief that folk culture was the source of all creative traditions in the Caribbean. Like earlier women writers/poets they too appear to have faith in the expressive powers of language, yet they differ insofar that they try to use it to defamiliarize familiar meanings, using tools like symbolism, magic realism and the skillful use of the stream-of-consciousness technique.

As individuals, as writers, women wrote about what concerned them, and their experience was naturally shaped by being female. They overtly focus on anthropology as a discourse for knowing and classifying the ‘other’ according to patriarchal and eurocentric prejudices.

As in women’s prose, critics often seemed blind to the irony in women’s poetry and failed to realize that the closure of possibilities, restriction to confined spaces, and the denial of basic rights that women portrayed within their own domestic milieu related, by implication, to the larger society as well. An alternative state of consciousness lends a surrealistic quality to their works, while at the same time enables the writers to transform reality by using language and style unconventionally.

Many of the West Indian women writers have attempted to create new ways of metaphorical and symbolic expression, indicative perhaps of the resources available to contemporary women writers: a vast kaleidoscope of modes and styles ranging from autobiography to lyric
Poetry to historical narrative, psychoanalytic explanation and so on. They also draw extensively on oral history and the central importance of relationships between women. Through mother-daughter relationships, and women-centered narratives, important stories and values are passed down to younger generations, stories that represent women's collective experience. Olive Senior's collection of stories and poems is a particularly fine example of this.

Many critics have pointed to Jamaica Kincaid as one of the most innovative and interesting of contemporary Caribbean writers, and there have been several articles engaging with her fiction through contemporary literary theory. Such approaches have tended to focus on the convergence of feminist and psychoanalytic theories which are centrally concerned, as Kincaid's writing appears to be, with the mother-daughter relationship. Perhaps one should shift the critical axis away from the application of theory to Kincaid's writing, in order to explore the way in which her writing itself could be seen as an alternative theory, a 'literary' theory which questions the assumptions within orthodox modes of interpretation, including feminist and psychoanalytic models. In other words our interest would and perhaps should lie with the ways in which post-colonial literature might help us to understand the limitations of certain theories, rather than with the ways in which theory can help us to understand post-colonial literature.

In the hope of suggesting a new perspective on the much debated nexus between Euro-centric theory and post-colonial literature, a close
reading of Kincaid’s fiction, rather than staging a debate solely among critics and theorists is required. In her essay ‘The Race for Theory’, which also interrogates this somewhat tense point of crossing and interprets the cultural resistance in the narratives of theory, Barbara Christian has stated that:

“People of colour have always theorized- but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking.”

It is this dynamism that flowers and bursts forth in an alternate state of consciousness, which lends a surrealistic quality to some of the writing, while at the same time enabling the writer to transform reality by using language and style unconventionally.

Eagleton maintains that “Literature in the meaning of the word we have inherited is a ideology. It has the most intimate relations to questions of social power.” For him, ideology consists of “… the ways in which what we say and believe connects with the power-structure and power-relations of the society we live in.” Caribbean women writers too, inevitably interact with ‘power-structures’ in their societies (which happen to be post-colonial patriarchies) and, explicitly or otherwise, this interaction shapes what they say in their art.
Indeed, several Caribbean women writers are not only aware of the ideological nature of their art, but expressly recognise - as does Merle Hodge - that "there is no fundamental contradiction between art and activism." Acknowledging "the power of the creative word to change the world," Hodge is quite open about the political thrust of her fiction. Lauretta Ngcobo’s lines, which serve as an epigraph to an essay in Motherlands are appropriate here: "Out of our acrid neighborhoods springs this rioting literature. It is not art for art’s sake; its vibrance and immediacy are intended to forge unity and wrench a new identity."

Caribbean women writers, in general, are implicitly committed to an ideology of change, to the necessity of exposing and subverting inequalities in their societies and sometimes suggesting ways in which transformations might come about. Their fiction also transforms consciousness, communicating a certain ‘way of knowing’ that deconstructs oppositionals on which imperial and patriarchal ideologies largely depend for power; in their writing we see that there is always the other side, the other perspective. Critics who read and study and teach this literature also share the ideological goals of the writers and the irreverent, ‘deconstructive’ way of thinking that adopts and adapts theoretical strategies at will in the service of such ideology. Recognizing this unity-in-diversity, can transcend the type of ‘wrangling’ mentioned by Sharon Chako: “accomplishment by other women seems to threaten our own little slice of the pie, and we draw apart in unhealthy rivalry.”
Further, given the multi-cultural nature of the region, the syncretism of creole cultures and languages, and the disparate voices and songs of Caribbean women writers who are products of such a ‘mixed bag’, the writers themselves distrust misused or rigidly appropriative criticism; such ‘colonizing’ tendencies are anathema to a fictional discourse that embraces pluralities, and to which complexity is fundamental.

As Toril Moi suggests, “the study of female tradition in literature... is surely more than a methodological choice: it is an urgent political necessity,”35 So critics, as well as writers are ideologically motivated. Moi notes that a reader may find a work of art ‘aesthetically valuable but politically distasteful’; however, it is important to realise that “aesthetic value judgements are [themselves] historically relative and... deeply imbricated in political value judgements.”36 All readings, then, are in some sense political.

Thus a feminist reading - which is one obvious way of reading Caribbean women’s writing - simply acknowledges this fact that seeks to deconstruct an opposition between the political and the aesthetic so that one becomes aware of the politics of aesthetic categories as well as of the implied aesthetics of political approaches to art.

Nevertheless it would appear that at least some Caribbean women writers resist political labels, seeing them as limiting or inappropriate. To be termed a ‘feminist author’ may offend a women writer who considers
that her political context is not adequately represented in certain schools of ‘international’ feminism.

It is therefore necessary, first, to address the indictment of feminism as an alien theoretical/ideological phenomenon. Rhoda Reddock acknowledges that in post-colonial territories, hardly any “other word in modern times has been so vilified for its European origins as feminism,” but she goes on to say that feminism is not a recent import into the Caribbean. Indeed, the modern women’s movement in the English-speaking Caribbean is the continuation of a rich struggle for women’s emancipation firmly based within the socio-political and historical context of this region.

By ‘feminism’ Reddock means, “the awareness of subordination and exploitation of women in society, and the conscious action to change that situation.” Different feminists vary in their understanding of the problem and on the strategies necessary for the solution.

Toril Moi considers feminity as “that which is marginalised by the patriarchal symbolic order.” Yet one sees the insistence in contemporary theoretical ideologies/orientations on the relativity of judgement: “What is perceived as marginal at any given time depends on the position one occupies.” When women/children/girls are marginally positioned in the symbolic order, and construed by patriarchy as the limit, the border-line of that order, attention can be drawn to the questioning of the fundamental presuppositions generally held to be true.
Thus several critics of the Caribbean diaspora of women’s literature are working towards a theoretical position which paradoxically refuses rigid definition. Caribbean women’s writing shares with other post-colonial literatures a distrust of the ‘rarefied’ nature of literary theory; as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin observe, “in some oral societies where narrative dominates, ways of knowing are legitimized as a product of actual social relations and not valorized and reified as a separate ‘objective’ category above and beyond other categories.” In addition, they quote Soyinka, censoring the native critic who adopts European theory wholesale, never stopping “to consider whether or not the universal verities of his new doctrine are already contained in, or can be elicited from the world-view and social structures of his own people.” They note that European theory - even the idea of ‘theory’ - has been rejected as irredeemably Eurocentric (and for feminists, male) in its assumptions and political effects. Finally they warn of the dangerous tendency of theoretical re-incorporation of post-colonial texts “into a new internationalist and universalist paradigm.” Abruna cities Ketu Katrak’s reference to this appropriation of post-colonial texts as ‘raw material’ for the production of literary theory and warns against using ‘prescriptive models’ in interpreting West Indian women’s fictions.

Thus there is a need for synthetic theoretical approaches which can and do take account of the multiplicity, complexity, and the intersection of apparently conflicting orientations which we find in the writing. As Moi notes, feminists have politicized almost all existing critical methods and approaches; as theorists and critics of Caribbean literature by women,
a similar policy of unapologetic indigenizing appropriation might be recommended, an approach which combines methodological heterogeneity and ideological commonality while refusing to be ultimately formalized, boxed and labelled under any one ‘ism’.

E. HEIGHTS AND DEPTHS45 - The vision of Kincaid and Senior.

A delighted fascination with inter-connectedness, a world constructed and shaped within a network of language pervades the stories and poems in both Senior’s and Kincaid’s collections. In the beginning are words, from which all else originates; being visual artists both claim that colour, space and shape are both the source of creative energy and the only reliable indications of meaning. Although vision is essential, both to read the works on the page and to enter the world they generate, in these stories words themselves take precedence, for everything is contained within them, and where interdependency of words and vision is explored in a truly linguistic extravaganza.

The title of Olive Senior’s first collection of poems is both ambiguous and apt. Talking of Trees would seem to indicate a collection of meditative nature poems; however, the title itself is an ironic deflection, away from the conventional bourgeois notions of poetry as Wordsworthian subjectivity, towards a more problematic stance in which a politically committed and activist position is demanded of the poet. The title of this anthology of poems is taken from Bertolt Brecht’s question which appears as an epigraph to the second half of the book:
What kind of period is it
when to talk of trees
is almost a crime
because it implies silence
about so many horrors? (TT p 45)

And indeed, Senior’s poems demonstrate the struggle of a literary sensibility to reflect and understand the daily violence of her ordinary world, from domestic abuse to colonialist oppression to post-colonial corruption and mayhem.

The book is divided into two sections. The first section circles around themes of homeland, ancestors, family and community, and landscapes of mountains and valley, which seems to spring from earlier experiences in Senior’s life. The opening poem ‘Homescape’ (TT p 1) sets the location for the rest of the book, the physical setting of isolated mountain, and the spiritual/cultural landscape of mountains and solitaires.

I was born with the knowledge
Of mountains and solitaires
till jet planes and skyscrapers
Seduced this to
mountains alone and one note
of the solitaire
till the politicians’ words
reduced this to mountains
alone now the solitaire sings not
and knowledge is brittle
as glass.

If the solitaire sings again
I'll be born to that life again

Alone I will walk through the glass
And become.

Senior's language resources here as elsewhere in most of her poems are strictly metonymic; jet planes, skyscrapers and politicians figure in the forces of modernization that the poem critiques as destructive of a golden-age childhood world. This binary construction of ideas is a common feature in Senior's poems.

Her imagination anchors itself in a dualistic vision, as in the poems titled 'Birdshooting Season' 'Cockpit Country Dreams' and 'Ancestral Poem' (TT p 2,4,10)

Little boys
longing to grow up birdhunters too

Little girls whispering:
Fly birds fly.

and
Our road led to places on maps
Places that travelled people
knew. Our river, undocumented
was mystery

and

Some wheels
sing freedom, the others
Home.

In the best poems, fortunately, Senior moves beyond the expression
of closed dual systems with their predictable tensions of good/evil,
positive/negative to a complex visioning of her own complicated,
shifting, and unstable position as subject in a disordered post colonial
society:

Listen child, said my mother
Whose hands plundered photo albums
of all back ancestors: Herein
your ancestry, your imagery, your pride.
Choose this river, this rhythm, this road.
Walk good in the footsteps of these fathers.
(Yet she could no more stop my mind slipping
those well-worn grooves of piety, work, praise
than rivers cease flowing).
Listen child, said my father
from the quicksand of his life:
Study rivers. Learn everything.
Rivers may find beginnings
in the clefts of separate mountains
Yet all find their true homes
in the salt of one sea
Now my disorder of ancestry
proves as stable as the many rivers
flowing round me. Undocumented
I drown in the other's history. (TT p 4,5)

The first section of the book is an attempt to document her family
and community history. Many of the poems present fragments of
narratives that vivify ancestral characters:

My ancestors are nearer
than albums of pictures
I trend on heels thrust
into broken-down slippers
My mother's womb impelled
harvests perpetually. She
deeply breathed country air
when she laboured me.
The pattern woven by my father's hand lulled me to sleep. Certain actions moved me so: my father planting.

When my father planted his thoughts took flight.

He did not need to think.

The ritual was ingrained in the blood, embedded in the centuries of dirt beneath his fingernails encased in the memories of his race.

(Yet the whiplash of my father's wrath reverberated days in my mind with the intensity of tuning of forks.

He did not think.

My mother stunned wept and prayed Father

Forgive Them knowing not
Olive Senior writes out of a clear awareness of a conflicted life which is only by effort brought into any kind of control and clarity. She speaks to her childhood lived between two homes, a village ‘darkskin’ and a ‘lightskin’ middle class environment where she was being groomed for status and advancement. In Talking of Trees she quotes Martin Carter, ‘But what the leaves hear/is not what the roots ask,’ which stresses on this disparity. Her vision is often one of solitude: ‘Alone I will walk through the glass.’ In ‘Cockpit Country Dream’ she speaks of father and mother saying different things as ‘Portents of a split future’. For her, poetry becomes the balancing point, the crossroads at which all directions have to meet. Senior determines life through an awareness of many directions and contradictions facing the individual, and her poetry becomes the place where at least distances and schisms can be spoken of and accepted.
Senior draws from her own heritage, evokes her rural background and celebrates its rituals to bring lively attention to all aspects of Jamaican life, landscape and language. ‘Ancestral poem’ tells of this heritage, the poet’s hard-won freedom from its rituals and rigours, and its continuing hold on her imagination. This is a complex poem, its juxtapositions at first relatively untroubled, but quickly becoming very disturbing, as thoughts and emotions are intersected by the menace of ingrained ritual and encased memory, and then by the violence and betrayal that are their legacy. The second stanza in parentheses, portrays one of those moments outside any frame of resolution - a moment of fierce and indelible irrationality, represented by the confusing of her father on earth with the Father in heaven, a confusion that intensifies the disabling bewilderment of the moment and of her memory.

The irony of the final line of this whole passage, where the deeply ambivalent ritual of religious confirmation provides a gesture of freedom in a language that accumulates betrayal and abstraction, is hauntingly reminiscent of one of the recurring themes of this book, for the ambiguous syntax is generated by the local use of the word ‘me’ in a literary context. And the final word ‘freedom’ with its rhetorical flourish, is as much a gesture of ill-fated defiance of her heritage as a description of any new liberation.

The picture of life dominated by natural cycles, where the ‘ritual was ingrained/in the blood’ is opposed to life in the city. Out of this double experience emerges the poet’s capacity for endurance:
Still, if I could balance
water on my head I can
juggle worlds
on my shoulders (TT p 10)

and also her ear for rhythm and her conflicting interior voices:

Now against the rhythms
of subway trains my
heartbeats still drum
worksongs. Some wheels
sing freedom, the others
Home. (TT p 10)

Similarly in ‘To My Arawak Grandmother’

I reach but a finger across the universe.
Distance is only space-time and we
exist in the continuum. Understanding
reaches to shake hands across history
books……..

I choose you
for affirmations pulsing still
in spite of blood shed or infused... (TT p 11)

And in ‘Searching for grandfather’
In Colon I searched for my
grandfather without connection.
Not even the message of his
name in the phone book.
Along the Line I found my
grandfather disconnected
at Culebra.

Hacking at the Cut
he coughed his brains loose
and shook
(but it was only malaria).
You’re lucky they said as they
shipped him home to the deck
of a steamer, his mind
fractured but his fortune intact:
Twenty-eight dollars and two
cents. Silver.
For although his life had been
lacking in baggage, they didn’t
want him to see that on this
voyage out he still travelled
steerage. (TT p 12,13)
Senior’s acerbic irony endows many of her poems with a tender bitter humour. Thus in the portrait of the grandfather, we are told: “What he had learnt to do really/well in Colon was wash corpses.” (TT p 13)

The more narrative poems and those written in voices using the personae of struggling farmers perhaps, because they allow the poet to write outside the prison-house of subjectivity, are sensuously evocative and strong:

This is no place for a
Christian man to
live in.... ... 
Land is dear, rum's
Still cheap (TT p 8)

and

The sun etches out the minutes of my days
under my dark eyes.... the hours stake out
the limits of our lives
on this, my harsh and gentle land.
My ring finger tingles as my machete
flints on a stone. From far
hear my wife pounding cassava
in a cracked mortar singing
a cracked tune ()
the futility
of crop cultivation in the place
the census takers never come.... ..
The sun cuts an arc on the housetop
the day goes by
my thoughts tremble on the edge
of something undesirable
my wife sings still
the sunbaked questions
of our lives.... (TT p 17,18)

A firmness of imagery communicates the stark suffering of rural poverty: "Among the yam vines/And the trumpet trees we need/no clocks, no timepieces, no time / for the hunger in our bellies tell us / which way a clock’s hands should go." (TT p 18)

The second section shifts to urban scenes. With the increasing violence of narrative and scene is an increased sophistication of analysis. The poet’s voice becomes more ideologically pronounced. The poem that begins this section deliberately presents her as a Third World speaker:

Friend of the cellophane world
Separate packets
Of instance dreams
just add money
and mix -
Do not
O do not say
it is the sea only
that divides us
the sole disjunction
a continental drift
that despite earth’s wrinkles
we remain
‘true brothers’
that you understand
You do not understand.
How can you in your
central-heated city know
how sunspots on unpainted
tin shacks
sliver my eyesight
shaft my mind
with their infinite
refractions?
Friend,
You do not understand
sickle cell anaemia
or sleeping on pavements
as we cannot understand
Baseball Season
- or Fall
We do not need
interstellar leaps
we want to shorten
distances between
hospitals
And though flies
Might cover the fish
in our open marketplaces
that does not kill,
like napalm.
We remain
not yet processed
cellophane wrapped
and frozen stiff
ready to be bagged
Though Rand McNally charts us
You can hardly now locate us
For we've found
that we're still waiting
to be found.
Even as we await that
Second Coming ...
cosmic disturbances
tremble the sea
our bellies rumble
cities tumble
earth shifts
new wrinkles
divide us. (TT p 47-49)

Despite the apparent openness of address that claims a relationship between this ‘Lesser World’ speaker and her ‘Friend’, the poem is a critique of the United States of America which is presented as destructively capitalist and militaristic. At the same time, the poet offers no false idealisation of her own ‘undeveloped’ society, and the images she presents are counter images to the frozen, cellophone-wrapped consumerism of the developed world.

The second section also demonstrates a greater experimentalism. Senior writes in free verse, eschewing the resources of rhyme, meter and stanzaic form, but the later poems attempt more effects through typographical arrangements on the page, effects that underline the poem
as a visual/print artifact. She also experiments with the use of pidgin and colloquial syntax, effects that underline the poem as oral and communal property. These rhetorical practices that push the poems in two separate and contradictory directions grow organically out of the contradictory motivations in Senior’s poetry, the need for a private tenderness and the necessity to accommodate the intrusive disruptions of socio-political reality into the poet’s sensibility. The poems indicate a transformation in sensibility, away from the deracinated and alienated romantic: “How can I root/where you’ve poured cement?/ I need a blade of grass/ to rest on lest I topple,” (TT p 52) to a growing identification with her community and its history.

In ‘To the Madwoman in My Yard’, the speaker toughly distinguishes herself from the crazy loser: ‘you don’t move me one blast,’ but speaks with an exasperated understanding and sisterhood, saying in the end that they are divided by the certainty that ‘Life Equals Control.’ Conversely there is also an assertion of overt similarity: “I wear my madness in. You wear yours out.” (TT p 56) The last sentence carries the ambivalent suggestion that a madness that is used for power is preferable to that which is powerless, worn out.

And that is very much the impression of the later poems: an increasing confidence of language and tone. Many of the later poems are overtly political and satirical. ‘The Mother’ is one of Senior’s most realised poems, written as a dialogue between a sexually abused girl and her callous mother. The mother, cruel and hypocritical, is the type of
woman fostered by a patriarchal world of incestuous fathers and uncles and gun-toting males. Senior’s moral condemnation is implied in her vivid re-presentation of the corrupt relations that make up this society, a society made credible above all by the pidgin speech of girl and mother:

Muma mi belly soon

grow bed so small

last night Uncle Paul

bizniz with me

didn’t know till he done -

Hush yu mout little gal

have no right

talk such nonsense

how come yu so shurance

and force ripe. Uncle Paul

help with the school fees

and dress say he like

-what go on under cover

girls look nice when they go

off to school

Muma no school today

mi body a hot me. Mi

head dis a grow muma

beg yu no lash me
One night you even say
yu own father did try
O god pickney nowadays
so wicked and lie (TT p 68)

The voices in this poem speak of the life of the West Indian poor, for whom the legacy of slavery has produced new forms of disgust and despair, and whose only hope may be in bearing witness to their own lives in their own words - words full of suffering and self-hatred and the sad ironies of self-conscious pretence and pathos.

The last two long poems in the collection gather together many of the major motifs and themes. ‘Reaching My Station’ is a later treatment of the theme of homeland. The poet, older and more experienced, returns to her village, “Finding / a landscape redrawn by pigmies / in your giant’s eyes the people shrivelled.” (TT p 76) In place of early nostalgia, the disillusioned eye offers a pessimistic and cynical social analysis: the old ones have only their pride, the young people understand only violence, and the village produces chiefly babies. The poet, neither inside nor outside this morally and materially shrunken world, must accept her ‘station’: to descend to it, or to ‘perpetually ride’, a transient without a homeland.

The concluding poem, which in also the title poem, is the best in the anthology. It is persuasively oral, utilizing the rhythms and speech colourations of a specific community. It is also a highly literary
achievement, basing its imagery, associations, and allusions on the specific history of a place. The notes to the poem are helpful in providing the context of local Jamaican post-colonial history to which the poem refers. In this poem, Senior's linguistic abilities match the ambition of her theme and the seriousness of the content. Here, talking about trees is identical, not at cross-purposes, to talking about people, history, and politics; and the social protest is not an enemy of song. The single metaphor of trees once standing on the parade grounds of Kingston as a figure for Jamaican colonial and post-colonial struggles proliferates to penetrate the entire poem with its colour, multiplicity of meanings, and layered references:

*The Ebony trees are celebrating rain*
*Spathodea's lapping Kingston like a flame*
*On the western railing Scarlet Cordias burn*
*Casuarina weeps Laburnum's numb*
*And Woman's Tongue clatters out of turn...*
*Tamarind Tree Swayed. But Banyan held firm.*
*Solja a come*
*Blood fe Blood*
*Fire fe Fire*
*Colour fe Colour*
*Fustic stain their khaki*
*Mahogany stain their floor*
*Ironwood stain my life*
From my Calahash break
Blood stain my
Baby
Cane trash mi life
Cane break mi spirit
Cane sweeten mi bizzie
Banana rotten mi clothes
Stone-bruck mi womanhood
Cargo strain mi sususcle
Police baton bus 'mi head
Now what can we create behind fences?
Deadwood
Holes in the ground
Towers of Concrete
Bridges of Loneliness
Twigs of Derision
Corollas of Sadness
Flowers of Suspicion
Jerusalem Thorn crown me
Almond nurture me
Guango shade me....
But the pages are scattered
The leaves are all fallen
Talking of Trees demonstrates the organic primacy of the imagination that characterises a poet who is finally at home with her theme and her language. Olive Senior’s Summer Lightning and Other Stories is principally preoccupied with transposition, and the disorientation this brings. Displacement comes in many forms with characters appearing figuratively as refugees, completely out of place. Children taken from their homes, their parents, and separated from the world they know are forced to make sense of the new social context they find themselves in. Not only do they have to deal with this new social context, but they must come to terms with the contiguous issues of race and class. As a consequence of their displacement and alienation, characters strive to create an opening for themselves. The majority of the tales feature a female character, and the dominant perspective is that of a child, and it is a poignant evocation of the child’s world, an often mysterious pot-pourri of magic, horror and folklore. The stories deal with threats from the external world, whether physical or emotional, and the half-understood and painful conflicts within.

The opening story, ‘Summer Lightning’ paradigmatically introduces Senior’s major themes: displacement, space, God, familial relationships and climactic revelation. These motifs recur throughout Summer Lightning and Other Stories and anticipate Senior’s later anthologies like Arrival of the Snake Woman and Discerner of Hearts.
In each story, Senior’s characters’ perception of the world differs from those who try to socialise and inscribe them into the world. The characters try to frustrate the contractive process of socialisation in order to arrive at a point where they must articulate themselves into the world. This is a terrifying and solitary experience: rarely successful, occasionally resulting in emancipatory disquietude. Each story is fitted with a narrative language integrated into the dominant point of view; often narrative language is the speaker’s language and spans the Jamaican creole continuum.

The nameless boy of ‘Summer Lighting’ lives with his ‘stiff and proper’ uncle and aunt who are unable to comprehend ‘the mysteries of this world’. To adjust to their environment, the boy must find a space for himself and articulate himself into the world. This search for space is a quest for independence. He chooses the garden room, ‘a place where he could hide during thunderstorms’. Thunderstorms have religious and punitive importance, not only in this story, but in the others. Bro. Justice warned the boy that “Lighting is Jah triple vision. Is like X-ray dat.” (SL p 1) Caught between his aunt, uncle, and the portentous clouds, he finds the garden room the perfect sanctuary. In the room he would close the curtains, literally locking out the world, and metaphorically grow: “It was as if when he closed the windows and doors, the doors of his mind flew open one after another, like living inside the heart of an opening flower.” (SL p 2)
Even when it is cool he enjoys the security of the room because it allows him the opportunity to define himself: "...as long as he was alone in this room he was happy because he knew instinctively that if in the world he had nothing else, he was still rich because he had this space which allowed him to explore secret places inside him.” (SL p 3)

Alienation and displacement occur because the transposed characters are moulded, polished, and sculpted to conform to an image contrapuntal to their experience. They are precariously balanced between two worlds. In ‘Summer Lighting’ the cause of the boy’s displacement is clearly spelt out:

“In that big house with the perpetual smell of wax, the heavy mahogany furniture, the glass windows, he felt displaced, as if he had been plucked from one world which was small and snug and mistakenly placed into another which was like a suit many times too large and to which he could never have hopes of growing to a perfect fit....” (SL p 5)

Apart from being physically and emotionally displaced from his parents, the boy has to conform to his aunt’s expectations. His failure to ‘fit in’ is unspokenly censured. Bro. Justice, on the other hand, has carved out a life for himself that is semi-independent from society. Consequently, his transgression of social conventions and roles upsets the aunt because: "...he had lost that respect for them which had been
inculcated in men like him for centuries, and which the aunt at least considered only her due.” (SL p 6)

Thunderstorms and lightning are emblematically portrayed by Senior as God’s way of wrecking punishment on sinners. This is a consistent theme. The displaced person has great difficulty finding meaning in the world, and the existence of a retributive God makes matters worse. In ‘Summer Lightning’, the boy’s effort to find a space is a way of defusing the potential wrath of God. The old man who usurps his place in the room threatens the sense of self he established, and upset the meaning he has conferred onto the world. Now the boy is doubly displaced.

“...And he sensed that the old man would one day draw close enough to touch him even as he feared that if this ever happened, everthing - Bro. Justice, the room, the magic world, even the order of the aunt and the uncle’s life that he both loved and despised - would be lost to him forever and he too might thereafter be condemned to float wonderingly in time and space in a suit many times too large.” (SL p 9)

‘Summer Lightning’ concludes on a terrifying note, with the boy unable to act on his own and waiting for lightning and Bro. Justice to save him. He grasps his talisman, an ivory elephant given to him by the
man, and points it to the door awaiting salvation. Lightning, something he originally feared is in the air, but we are left unsure of its efficacy.

In many of the stories, parents are, or at least a parent is, absent, and the children occupy a world where they must transgress social expectations. What they discover is that it is hard to escape the determinism associated with acculturation. The girl in 'Confirmation Day' wants to break the restraining bonds of her childhood:

"The formality of my grandmother's church has woven a pattern from which it is difficult to break out, reject, just as my grandmother's life - the big house, the fixed mealtimes, the daily ritual and the necessity of Confirmation and other observance on the Book of Common Prayer, created a mould into which the crazy-mad fragments of my other, disordered life was being squeezed." (SL p 83)

The complexity of the society is indicated, though briefly, by the author's reference to some of the economic and social norms of the Caribbean, and the important, through stifling role the Church played in education. Joyce Matadeen, in an article has remarked that "In the Caribbean the school came with the Church, and the two have remained inseparable to this day." In fact the epigraph of this story is an evocative cry of Rilke in Duino Elegies: "Who, if I cried, would hear me among the angelic orders?"
Socialisation is a claustrophobic experience because she is denied her own individuality and forced into a pattern. The search for space and identity comes at a price. After her ‘confirmation’ she still feels that she’d rather be a child of someone else because, ‘being a child of God is too frightening’.

The world is portrayed as a terrifying place, as it undoubtedly is when one is a child, and the irrationality of the world experienced by the main characters is intensified by the confusion created by the efforts of the adults to socialise them. The transmogrifying clouds haunt the girl in ‘Confirmation Day’: “the terrible reality of him chasing me in clouds of horror everyday.” (SL p 82) God and dying seem to be the same thing. The church smells of age, moth balls, and bat droppings and “all belong to the other side of the world and all are in league with the clouds of terror.” (SL p 82) To escape the pre-ordained world of adult and God, she must make her own meaning and withstand the powerful influence of socialisation that her grandmother embodies. Amidst the singing, she notices the transparent tattered reality of the church: threadbare, inconsequential. The frightening world of God that she is being inculcated into is renounced. Her confidence after rejecting the world of adults brings her to the conclusion that “All that has gone before has no occasion, no meaning.” (SL p 84) Unconquerable, the rituals of religion, just like the rituals of socialisation, will not affect her.

Personal space is repeatedly denied to Senior’s characters. Yet, in the end, the girl is “...shocked to discover a new power in myself. I know
instinctively that not the reeds in the river nor the wine nor the blood of Christ nor the Book of Common Prayer can conquer me. And not a single cloud of God is in that sky.” (SL p 84)

Beccka, the precocious eleven year old protagonist in ‘Do Angels wear Brassieres’ has evolved a tough yet hilarious stance against the blind faith adults, especially her aunt Mary had in the Bible. Constantly at war with her mother Cherry’s sister Mary, Beccka is not afraid to speak her mind, as in the starting lines of the story:

“Beccka down on her knees ending her goodnight prayers and Cherry telling her softly, ‘And ask God to bless Auntie Mary.’ Beccka vex that anybody could interrupt her private conversation with God so, say loud, ‘No. Not praying for nobody that tek weh mi best glassy eye marble’.... Beccka just stick out her tongue at the world, wink at God who she know right now in the shape of a big fat anansi in a corner of the roof, kiss her mother and get into bed.” (SL p 67)

She questions the tenets of the Bible: “Beccka reading the Bible in secret from cover to cover not from any conviction the little wretch but because everybody round her always quoting that book and Beccka want to try and find flaw and question she can best them with.” (SL p 67)
On the occasion of the Archdeacon’s visit she regales him with witty questions and ripostes:

"‘Tell me my girl, is there anything in the Bible you would like to ask me about?’

‘Yes sir. Who in the Bible wrote big?’

This wasn’t the kind of question Archdeacon expecting but him always telling himself how he have rapport with children so he decide to confess his ignorance.

‘Tell me, who?’

‘Paul!’ Beccka shout.

‘Paul?’

‘Galations six eleven - See with how large letters I wrote onto you with mine own hands.’

‘Ho Ho Ho Ho’ Archdeacon laugh. ‘Well done. Try me with another one.’

Beccka decide to ease him up this time.

‘What animal saw an angel?’

‘What animal saw an angel? My word. What animal ... of course. Balaam’s Ass.’

Beccka jumping up and down she so excited. She decide to ask the Archdeacon a trick questions her father did teach her.
‘What did Adam and Eve do when they were driven out of the garden?’

‘Hm’, the Archdeacon sputtered but could not think of a suitable answer.

‘Raise Cain ha ha ha ha ha.’

The Archdeacon promise himself to remember that one to tell the Deacon. All the same he not feeling strictly comfortable. It really dont seem dignified for an Archdeacon to be having this type of conversation with an eleven-year-old girl. But Beccka already in high gear with the next question and Archdeacon tense himself....

‘What is the smallest insect in the Bible?’

‘The widow’s mite,’ Archdeacon shout.

‘The wicked flee,’ Beccka cry.

Archdeacon laughing so hard now he starting to cough. He cough and cough till the coughing bring him to his senses.” (SL p 74,75)

Getting a grip on himself, the Archdeacon asks Beccka if she had any serious questions:

“Beccka look at Archdeacon long and hard. ‘Yes,’ she say at long last in a small voice. Right away
Archdeacon sit up straighter.... Beccka screwing up her face in concentration.

‘Sir, what I want to know is this for I cant find it in the Bible. Please sir, do angels wear brassieres?’” (SL p 75)

Needless to say, the two women are mortified, and Beccka’s question remains unanswered. Finally it is her best friend, Mr ‘O’Connor who matter-of-factly enlightens her: “‘Well, Beccka, as far as I know only the lady angels need to.’ Beccka laugh cant done. Was’nt that the answer she was waiting for?” (SL p 79)

**Summer Lightning and Other Stories** is littered with fractured and incomplete family units. This separation often brings children into two worlds and as they grow aware of their own consciousness, their search for independence and space is compromised by the expectations inherent within the socialisation process. Senior explores the difficulties in knowing one’s place in a society conditioned by colonialism and Christianity, a world of pecuniary extremes, a world of fissured families and isolated communities. Senior subtly exposes the repressiveness and self-sacrifice at the core of conventional morality as it has been applied to girls and women, and the spiritual and emotional deformities, which result. Only Beccka seems to have the inner resources to challenge the stultifying restrictions imposed by authority on the girl child.
The stories of *Summer Lighting*, Senior says, focus on the Jamaica of her childhood; they portray an almost idyllic community organically connected to the Jamaican landscape and reveal the frightening inadequacies in the society for the nurturing of the maturing individual, and emphasise the problems and perspectives of poor rural children, while those in *Arrival of the Snake Woman* and other Stories, are more expansive, involving characters of different races and classes, rich and poor, in both rural and urban settings. But, both collections are explorations of Jamaican experience and identity within a larger network of competing cultures; an awareness of that enveloping, sometimes corrosive larger culture is never very far from the background of Senior’s stories precisely because the problematic relationship between the isolated, enclosed societies of the West Indies and the wider world is such a pervasive fact of Caribbean life.

The major themes of *Summer Lighting* - the search for personal and cultural identities, the nurturing role of the West Indian mother in creole society, the problematic and complex relationships between traditional ways and the wider world - are continued and expanded in *Arrival of the Snake Woman*. The seven pieces in this collection continue and deepen Senior’s explorations of the oppressive effects of race, class and gender in post-colonial Jamaica. Most of the stories are clinical but sympathetically imaginative studies of the genesis of a false consciousness that imprisons middle-class Jamaicans in materialism and pretensions. A major exception is the title story, in which the pragmatic
materialism of the protagonist breaks down the imprisoning traditions and prejudices of a rural community.

Olive Senior deploys a wide range of narrative styles and techniques. The longer stories, ‘The Tenantry of Birds’, ‘The View from the Terrace’, ‘Lily, Lily’, and the title story, cover long tracts of time, largely by summary narration, while at the other extreme, ‘The Two Grandmothers’ is presented as excerpts from the direct speech of a child from her early years to puberty, reflecting her indoctrination into bourgeois values. Again with the exception of the title story, the narration tends to reflect the consciousness of the principal characters while maintaining an ironic tension between their views and those of the implied author. Much of the effectiveness of the text and the pleasure in reading these stories comes from this ironic tension.

‘The View from the Terrace’ takes up the question of identity most directly, focussing as it does on the lifelong struggle of its protagonist Mr. Barton to associate himself with what Senior has called ‘the colonial superstructure’ that ‘determined everything’. From early childhood, Mr. Barton has longed for ‘a world that somehow seemed rooted on its axis’, and finds it in the literature of “daffodils and the downs and snow and damsels in distress” (ASW p 96) - the imagined world of England. Cultivated by teachers and “a succession of English bosses... who appreciated... his liking for things ‘civilized’ i.e., English,” (ASW p 96) he develops a distaste for black people (although he is himself darker than his first wife) and a deep seated discomfort for his native country. But
trips to Europe make him aware that he is not really English either, and his second marriage, to an ‘incredibly vulgar’ white Englishwoman ends in divorce. The ideal of home - where it is, what it is - is never very far the centre of Senior’s attention. Mr. Barton’s ‘European’ house is divided from Miss Vie’s ‘Jamaican’ hut by a deep ravine. Here, a third person narrative reflects the consciousness of the protagonist, Mr. Barton, a retired civil servant who has internalized the values, attitudes, and ‘style’ off the British civil servants he and other members of his class replaced. He regrets the common “failure nowadays to observe the lines that in the past had been so strictly drawn and which he believed should continue to be, the certainties that regulated behaviours between the races, between bosses and employees, between men and women.” (ASW p 96) He resists change, and is baffled when he fails to determine the course of events - when, for example, his daughter and his second wife resist and escape his patriarchal oppression. He cuts himself off from the vibrant life around him, spending years speculating about the woman who lives in a ‘foolish, crazily built shack on the hillside’ opposite his own solid and substantial house, and he cannot survive the discovery (that he could have made anytime by asking a simple question) that his servant Marcus has been intimately involved with her life.

In ‘The Tenantry of Birds’ Senior attempts to bridge a gulf, bringing the two kinds of homes, with all their iconic associations together. The ‘tenantry’ of the title is a ‘rather bedraggled’, somewhat wild-looking bird tree growing in an otherwise very formal, English garden belonging to a wealthy Kingston couple. For the wife Nolene, the
tree represents a small part of the countryside where she spent many pleasant summers as a child. For her husband Philip, a university professor and political activist, the tree is an ‘unsightly’ excrescence which he would like to cut down.

Nolene, the wife, is particularly fond of watching the star boarders the pecharies’ drive out the rough uncouth, chattering and uncaring kling-klings when they attempt to take over. This detail provides the story with its governing metaphor, and Nolene with the example she later needs, to take similar action of her own. As Philip becomes more involved in politics, (and acquires a black mistress), the marriage disintegrates. He sends Nolene to Miami with their children ‘for safety’s sake’, as he puts it. One of the most delicate points Senior makes is that Philip, who like his wife, is a light-skinned Jamaican of the privileged social class, does not immerse himself in island politics because of an innate sensitivity to island culture, but his political activity is rather motivated more by ambition and ego than by sympathetic understanding; similarly, his behaviour towards his wife is closely akin to that of master and servant, or of colonial power to colony.

Here again the third person narrative reflects the consciousness of the protagonist Nolene, whose individuality is sacrificed, first to her mother and then to her husband, as she chooses, if indeed it is a choice, to be “beautiful and sweet and good. Like the protagonist in ‘The Two Grandmothers’, Nolene, when a child on holiday in the country with her ‘disorderly’ cousins, experiences an alternative world. She enjoys her
visits to the Chinese shop in the village, but recognizes that she must "never tell her mother about the visits to Mr. Chin's shop, for her mother said such places were dirty ... all Chinese were thieves...." (ASW p 51)

Finally, as Philips unfaithful behaviour comes to her knowledge she feels an overwhelming rage seep into every pore of her body:

"And this house of humans now was no better than the bird tree, for Philip had turned it into a tenantry - one bird out, another in. She sat there thinking for a long long time, getting angrier and angrier, her very anger hardening her, dragging her away from the tree, from the birds, forcing her to focus on her very self. This woman sitting on this verandah now. And finally she came to her decision. She thought, to hell with it! She would throw out the crotons and the anthuriums, the gerberas and the ixorias. She would... find the gardener and tell him never to touch the bird tree. It was her tree and her house and she was staying. He could move out." (ASW p 61)

While focusing on an individual consciousness, each of these stories succeeds in implicating and questioning the formative and deformative forces exerted by the larger social structures constituting the legacy of colonialism. In 'The Two Grandmothers', Grandma Del and Grandma Elaine symbolise contrasting ways of being, and contrasting value systems. Grandma Del represents the traditional ways of life of middle-class rural Jamaica, while Grandma Elaine represents upper middle-class sophistication and North American materialism. There is
wry humour in the inevitability with which the protagonist at puberty chooses trainer-bras and glossy magazines over the rural traditions that were significant and enjoyable in her childhood.

In each of the stories mentioned so far, the narrative stays close to the consciousness of the central character. In ‘Arrival of the Snake Woman’, the first person narration by the maturing boy Ishmael, captures the experiences of his village of Mount Rose, while registering his own reflections on them. The narrator offers a sympathetic but external account of the cultural dislocation suffered by Miss Coolie, the ‘snake woman’ so called, as Moses explains because of “the way their body so neat and trim and they move their hip when they walk just like a snake and they don’t wear no proper clothes just these thin little clothes-wrap, thinner than cobweb, yu can see every line of their body when they walk.” (ASW p 3)

She is at first ostracised, having come to the village as a result of Indian indenture. She remains an enigma to Ishmael, though his acceptance of her contrasts with the villagers’ covert rejection of her as a mysterious outsider, a heathen from the banks of the Ganges, according to Parson Bedlow’s Bible.

Ish, the narrator is bewildered and sick when the Parson refuses to administer medicine to the baby Biya, only because he is the son of a ‘heathen’ Indian woman who wore saris and bangles and did not conform to the Parson’s ideal of a reformed Christian:
“In later years of course I realised that my sickness was entirely of the soul, a way of coping with the things my mind refused to dwell on. And as I started to... re-enter the world, ...I was forced to face the painful truth of what ailed me, of how to reconcile Parson’s preaching about charity and love and the ministry of Jesus...who reached out to all,... with his behaviour to Miss Coolie and Biya. And I vowed that I would never be like Parson, never follow in his footsteps and be a missionary. I never again wanted to have anything to do with his life, his world, his book learning.” (ASW p 32)

In other stories in the collection, one may be tempted to read the world of rural Jamaica as the ‘authorised’, authentic, free alternative to the false and oppressive world of the Afro-Caribbean bourgeoisie. This story, however undermines any such comfortable generalisation by encapsulating within Mount Rose much of the complexity and uncertainty of Caribbean society, and a partial diagnosis of it in terms of its history. The people of Mount Rose had been living and working on the old coffee plantation for two generations since slavery ended. They feared that the white man might return to take the land over, considered cane as a symbol of the indignity of the slave past, and despised the Indians for coming to work the canefields.
Into this community ruled by superstition and puritanical Christianity, Miss Coolie (as the snake-woman liked to be called) brought a subversive alternative, eventually transforming the community through

“a pragmatic drive that allowed her to dispassionately weigh alternatives, make her decisions and act, while we still floundered around in a confused tangle of emotions, family ties, custom and superstition.

Her arrival represented a loosening of the bonds that had previously bound her, that bind all of us to our homes. Cut free from her past, she was thus free of the duties and obligations that tie us so tightly to one another, sometimes in a stranglehold. She became a free agent with a flexibility that enabled her to soar above our world which was still structured around our faith in the bisi nuts of the Oyo grandfather, Mother Miracle’s holy water and Jesus’ second coming. A flexibility that enabled her to ‘do business’ with family, friend, or the white men that came to buy produce from her. Miss Coolie, in short, is our embodiment of the spirit of the new age, an age in which sentiment has been replaced by pragmatism and superstition by materialism.” (ASW p 43,44)

It is therefore possible to read Miss Coolie’s materialism as a positive force, opening up a closed and oppressive structure left behind by slavery. For Ish would always:
"...wonder about her. For I find her still a great a mystery as when she came as our snake woman, so little of her has she revealed. Has she found happiness here in the heartland of a small island so far from home? Does she accept without regret the new life she has built since she decided for reasons known only to herself to accept Sonson's offer to bring her over the mountains? I can never be sure, for there is the evidence of the saris, the red dot, the Indian names. And sometimes, when I look into her eyes, I can still see the Ganges." (ASW p 45)

Like her earlier collection of stories, this collection again demonstrates Olive Senior's understanding of the mind of the child. Where a number of stories in the earlier collection were narrated in 'nation language', appropriate to the social status of the protagonists, the language of the present collection is mainly the standard Jamaican English of the privileged central characters, Jamaican creole being reserved for the direct speech of minor characters. In standard English or in creole, she is a Jamaican voice, speaking with seriousness and humour about class, colour and gender in a post-colonial society. Her works ask for a greater attentiveness to the Caribbean world giving us a different music that rewards us liberally for our attentions.

Like Senior, another Caribbean writer from Antigua, Jamaica Kindcaid is also noted for her lyrical use of language. Her short stories
and novels have a hypnotic, poetic quality that results from her utilisation of rhythm and repetition. Her images, drawn from her West Indian childhood, recall Antigua, with its tropical climate, Caribbean food, local customs and folklore laced with superstitions. Many of her stories move easily from realism to surrealistic fantasy, as would a Caribbean folktale. She is also praised for her exploration of the strong but ambiguous bond between mother and daughter and her portrayal of the transformation of a girl into a woman. Thus her work touches upon the loss of innocence that comes when one moves out of the Eden that is childhood.

Kincaid's concern with racism, colonialism, classism, and sexism is rooted in her history. She does not hesitate to tackle these issues in her writing. In her non-fictional A Small Place, she directs the force of her language towards an examination of her native island of Antigua, presenting the beauty as well as the racism and corruption rooted in its colonial past. In her fiction, these same issues are not slighted; for example Annie John, At the Bottom of the River and Lucy address various forms of oppression and exploitation, and her childhood and early New York experiences are fictionalised in all three works.

Kincaid, writing from the metropolitan world of New York, returns exclusively to the childhood experience of growing up in Antigua. She has lived most of her adult life away from that setting; but it is to this childhood experience that she returns to find the possibilities of a creative adjustment to a world and time so different in its ethos.
Annie John is a semi-autobiographical novel dealing with her experience of growing up in Antigua. At the Bottom of the River is a collection of pieces combining reflection and memories of that early experience. The two works are in fact companion pieces, the one in straightforward prose, the other poetic and intuitional in style. The substance of the experience in Annie John reappears in the images of At the Bottom of the River.

The reader is immediately struck by the originality of Kincaid’s work, an originality that comes both from the peculiar character of the experience she recalls, as from her singular rendering of it. In the more accessible Annie John, she recreates a vivid picture of growing up in a small tropical island environment before urban times. The conditions and lifestyle are still provincial. There are wooden shingle houses, their yards equipped with the inevitable breadfruit trees and the heap of stones for bleaching clothes; kerosene lamps have not yet been replaced by electricity. The men earn a living as fishermen and small craftsmen (Annie John’s father is a carpenter); the women are devoted to caring for their men and children and keeping house. The people still hold to their belief in obeah cures, superstitions and bush baths. At the same time, parents who are not too badly off strive to bring up their girls to be ladies according to the norms of Sunday School culture. Kincaid recalls the “manners lady” (AJ p 28) to whom one was sent for lessons in etiquette.

The atmosphere where Annie John grows is not one of privation, but of spare essentials. For the child growing up in that setting, life
revolved mainly around school and home. The familial and domestic tend to dominate life in this kind of environment: in Kincaid’s own case, home and setting were indistinguishable from each other, as this comment suggests: “I identified parental restrictiveness with the restrictiveness of my surroundings.” This experience of home, as Annie John records, centred especially on the figure of her mother. Kincaid’s memory clings to that focal experience of her mother, and her work deals extensively with growing up in that close childhood relationship between herself and her mother.

The attachment must have been all the more intense for one who remained an only child up to the age of nine. The prominent role of her mother in her life, however, also harks back to a common feature of West Indian family life documented by Edith Clarke in My Mother who Fathered me. Clarke showed how the prevailing types of conjugal relationships in West Indian society conspired to place the onus of responsibility for children on the mother, and left the father relatively free of parented obligation.

Annie John recalls being hastily gathered into her mother’s skirts whenever they passed “one of the women that my father had loved and with whom he had had a child or children.” (AJ p 17) The father of these removed connections did not ‘belong’ as fully as she and her mother belonged together. Add to this the fact that boys were banished from the world of a lady-like upbringing and we get the background to a curious feature in Kincaid: the figure of the woman remains deeply impressed on
her consciousness. The image of the other, what she idealises as well as resists, always appears in the form of a woman. Two main figures lie behind this woman-image: her mother, and the Red Girl, who survives from a childhood friend associated with freedom, power and the forbidden.

The particular circumstances of her background, therefore, and no doubt qualities of her own temperament, helped to deepen the seminal bond between mother and child. Revisiting that childhood, Kincaid gives testimony of the powerful ties between mother and child in what must rank among the most penetrating studies on the subject so far. Annie John traces the various stages of her progress from childhood to adolescence in terms of this relationship with her mother. It begins with the fullness of maternal love, care and nurturing in infancy. The experience of being ‘weaned’, a sundering between herself and her mother marks the passage to girlhood, so that growing up and beginning to fend for herself meant an experience of increasing disfavour with her mother, presaging a silent opposition and undeclared war between them.

Her mother, in effect, was the medium through which she entered her first world. She provided her with her earliest glimpses of the bigger world; she was the one most responsible for initiating her into the inner areas of self by arousing those complex emotions and sensitivities associated with the experience of growing up. The deeply embedded sense of her mother was to follow her down the years retaining the painful doubleness of the early period. Kincaid/Annie John recalls her
early prescience of this in the novel: "For I could not be sure when it was really my mother, and when it was really her shadow standing between me and the rest of the world." (AJ p 107)

In a review of Jamaica Kincaid’s *Annie John*, Kenneth Ramchand argues that “Annie’s process in the novel is a complex one involving the acceptance and at least poetical change, separation, death and sexuality as necessary elements of the moral state.” What Ramchand is in effect describing is the true essence of the adolescent struggle as it is portrayed in the West Indian novel in general. In *Annie John*, praised by Kenneth Ramchand as “the most effective evocation of girlhood and of a girl’s growing in a particular place,” the presence of sexuality is far less powerful than that of death. Sexuality manifests itself in many natural innocent images of kissing, pinching and hugging between Annie and her school friends, of the exchange of hard-won gifts, of trysts with Gwen and the Red Girl, and of breasts filling with the promise of womanhood. Sexuality is also manifested in an ambivalent image of Annie’s mother and father making love, but there the innocence is tainted when Annie associates her mother’s hand moving over the small of her father’s back with the hand of death. Counter balancing the positive images are such negative images of sexuality as the ‘barren, crippled’ Aunt Catherine and Mineu’s sadistic childhood game in which he gets a naive Annie to sit naked on a red ants’ nest and laughs hysterically when she cries from the pain of being stung. The most negative sexual moment in the novel occurs when Annie’s mother rather superfluously condemns her daughter for an alleged breach of the sexual, moral code:
...She went on to say that, after all the years she had spent drumming into me the proper way to conduct myself when speaking to young men, it had pained her to see me behave in the manner of a slut (only she used the French-patois word for it) in the street and that just to see me had caused her to feel shame. The word 'slut' (in patois) was repeated over and over, until suddenly I felt as if I were drowning in a well but instead of the well being filled with water it was filled with the word 'slut', and it was pouring in through my eyes, my ears, my nostrils, my mouth.” (AJ p 102)

Her mother’s harsh reprimand is really a function of the insistent recollection of her own adolescent sexuality, as Annie’s shattering reply indicates: “Well, like father like son, like mother like daughter.” (AJ p 102)

Much more dominant than the images of sexuality in the novel is the reality of death. The last word of the opening sentence is ‘died’, and this sets the tone for the narrative, during the course of which the major obstacle for Annie is her lack of understanding of the meaning of death. At first, Annie informs us that at ten years of age, “I thought only people I did not know died.” (AJ p 1) Death is not a familiar experience to her; indeed the novel explores the young heroine’s increasing familiarity with death. The entire first section of the novel entitled ‘Figures in the Distance’ is essentially about the protagonist’s lack of a first-hand
knowledge of death. Through a series of deaths, Annie, emotionally and psychologically, draws closer to these distant figures.

Moreover, death becomes curiously personal to Annie, since in its examination of the relationship between mother and daughter, the novel establishes the need for her to acknowledge the frightening reality, which is quite persistent, that something inside her wants to kill her mother: “I wanted only to see her lying dead, all withered and in a coffin at my feet.” (AJ p 106)

The onset of menstruation, the ‘coming of age’ destroys the perfect harmony with her mother. Paradise thus becomes oppression and confinement, in which Annie in her desire to discover and explore new experiences, becomes a live reflection of ‘Columbus in Chains’, a page-size colour picture in her history book. Her mother, has fettered her, so that Annie is forced to confess, “I felt I was being held down against my will.” (AJ p 144)

After a long illness, which lasts three and a half months, and ends as mysteriously as it began, Annie emerges a new person: she has grown to a considerable height, needs new uniforms and new shoes and even acquires a strange accent. Out of her long dark night of the soul, Annie’s new identity announces itself in the most assertive of all statements, (like Hamlet’s in Act V amidst death), ‘My name is Annie John.’ Following a pattern of separation begun by her grandparents, who sailed to South America leaving Annie’s parents behind, and continued by her mother,
who left Dominica when she was sixteen, Annie in her seventeenth year sets sail for England via Barbados. She realises that she wasn’t a child anymore and that to avoid creative and emotional death, she must leave both mother and motherland.

This then is Annie John in a nutshell; but at another level, layers of meaning and symbolism coupled with surrealism and magic realism can be read into this novel. It shouldn’t come as much of a surprise that this paradoxical fiction has been given such rough ride by first reviewers, puzzled and disturbed by its ‘obscurity’, as Anne Tyler has put it. Even though Annie John has received a more favourable welcome, one may suspect that its autobiographical character should take credit for this. Early reviewers have all praised the way it depicts life in Antigua and the coming-of-age of the protagonist. But because both the literary tradition and feminism have embraced autobiography as the official women’s genre, it doesn’t mean that Jamaica Kincaid has not challenged it as vigorously as she has questioned her previous intertextual references. Chapter Three provides us with a clue to the author’s interpretation of autobiographical writing. The personal essay written for class by the twelve-year-old Annie can be taken as a metaphor of the entire autobiographical novel: it demonstrates the ‘lies’ must enter autobiography when this is meant for a public audience. Exactly like the novel itself, the essay focusses on Annie and her mother and opens with the description of a paradisiacal imaginary pre-Oedipal stage. The union between mother and child is given by the scene at the sea when the two swim together in a relation of total dependence in which the daughter
could enjoy ‘all the sounds’ of the world by placing her ear against her mother’s neck as if it were a sea-shell.

The second part of the girl’s essay describes the symbolic phase, with the mother on a rock tracing patterns with the father, and the water separating them from the desperate daughter. The story is then a metaphor of the Oedipal crisis with the father, splitting up the dyadic unity between child and mother and the coming into existence of the speaking subject as a consequence of the desire for the lost mother. It is, in other words, the entrance into the symbolic, which Annie cannot yet accept. Therefore, she imposes a fictional closure on her autobiographical essay: she has her mother shed tears and hold her, rather than simply speak, in order to soothe her anxiety. This ‘lie’ is a return to the repressed union of the old days, a hiding of the bad side of reality.

Autobiography, then, manages to give us a feminist voice that stresses personal experience over the authoritarian universal; it does so without locating realism over symbolism, nor posing the author as the transcendental signifier of the test, as its meaning and origin. The pre-Oedipal unity in which the selves of mother and daughter are undifferentiated is the paradise of the first two chapters of Annie John, before the ‘young-lady business’ and when communication is complete. The narrative keeps interrogating this relationship, also after the realisation that, despite the same name, the two of them are two separate selves. Even after the two are physically separated, the caring and nurturing mother is always present, albeit mysteriously so like Ma Chess.
(Annie’s maternal grandmother), who comes and goes on a day when the steamer was not due in port.

The duality and non-linear temporality of the maternal cannot be comprehended by the casual discourse of a linear logic. Luce Irigaray, in *Ethique de la différence sexuelle*, has noted that the concept of sexual difference rests on the inter dependence between space and time i.e., on the spatialization of time that Kincaid has dismantled in *A Small Place*. But, as Kristeva in *Women’s Time* has pointed out, the time of feminine subjectivity is either cyclical or monumental - the repetition of biological cycles and the myth of the archaic Mother - rather than linear and spatial. For a re-definition of sexual difference outside the traditional dichotomy, it is necessary to reconcile these separate conceptions of time and to redefine the relationship of time and space. This is precisely what Kincaid’s writing and thought processes do. Annie John plays with realistic objective temporality: the adverbial phrase, ‘On the Sunday before the Monday’ is the most visible example of the mocking of spatialized temporality operating within a narrative that never refers to a time outside that of its own story. There are no dates in this autobiographical novel, but only the age of the protagonist: rather than a universal interpretation of history, we have a ‘conversation piece’:

“The rain went on in this way for over three months.
By the end of it, the sea had risen and what used to be dry land was covered with water, and crabs lived there.
In spite of what everyone said, the sea never did go
back to the way it has been, and what a great conversation piece it made to try and remember what used to be there where the sea now stretched up to.”

(AJ p 109)

Together with the dismantling of the sexual polarization, Annie John deconstructs the dichotomy of master/slave that is at the foundation of the colonial enterprise, resulting in a cry of protest as powerful as that uttered in the latest essay. After mocking the English for their questionable personal cleanliness — “Have you ever noticed how they smell as if they had been bottled up in a fish?” (AJ p 36), after having the English girl wear the dunce cap in class, after stressing that ‘our ancestors - the slaves had done nothing wrong except sit somewhere, defenseless’, she refuses to appropriate the Western concept of national and personal identity to express her anger at colonialism. Rather she dismantles the very dialectics that supports in and notes:

“Of course, sometimes, what with our teachers and our books, it was hard for us to tell on which side we really now belonged-with the masters or the slaves -for it was all history, it was all in the past, and everybody behaved differently now; all of us celebrated Queen Victoria’s birthday, even though she has been dead a long time. But we, the descendants of the slaves, knew quite well what had really happened, and I was sure that if the tables had been turned we would have acted differently;
I was sure that if our ancestors had gone from Africa to Europe and come upon the people living there, 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.” (AJ p 76)

This conclusion is an echo of the previous books. It is placed in the wonderful chapter ‘Columbus in Chains’, where, under a picture of an imprisoned Christopher Columbus Annie prints in old English lettering, ‘The Great Old Man Can No Longer Just Get Up and Go.’ The passage could find its explanation in the essay where the native tells the foreigner “…there must have been some good people among you, but they stayed home. And that is the point. That is why they are good. They stayed home.”

The episode of Columbus recalls a fundamental aspect of colonialism: education. This is stressed in the essay, in the discussion of the old library and the New Library, this being a building under repair since 1974. It is a good metaphor of colonial and post-colonial conditions. In A Small Place the narrator says she ‘stole many books’ from the old library, as does Annie John from the public library of Antigua. The narrative ostensibly ends with the final stage of Annie’s journey towards emotional maturity away from cultural security.

Similarly Kincard’s short stories are also strongly autobiographical, set in the West Indies, or incorporate images from the
islands and include many events from her youth and young adulthood. In general, her stories also chronicle the coming-of-age of a young girl. Because the mother-daughter relationship is central to the process, Kincaid often examines the powerful bond between them, a bond that the child must eventually weaken, if not break, in order to create her own identity.

The first of the ten stories in At the Bottom of the River is the often-praised and often-quoted 'Girl'. Barely two pages in length, the story outlines the future life of a young girl growing up on a small Caribbean island. The voice heard belongs to the girl’s mother as she instructs her daughter in the duties that a woman is expected to fulfill in a culture with limited opportunities for girls. Twice the girl interrupts to offer a feeble protest, but her mother persists.

The girl is told how to wash, iron, and mend clothes; how to cook fritters and pepper pot; how to grow okra; and how to set the table - in short, everything that will enable her to care for a future husband. She is told how to smile, how to love a man, and how to get rid of an unborn baby should it be necessary. Most important, however, her mother warns her about losing her reputation because then the girl (and this is left unsaid) loses her value as a potential wife. Almost as a refrain, the mother cautions, “On Sundays try to walk like a lady and not like the slut you are so bent on becoming” (BR p 3) or “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 becoming.”
On the island, a girl’s most important asset is her virginity as stressed by the mother.

The language is a prime example of Kincaid’s ability to work a hypnotic spell. The story consists of a series of variations of particular instructions: "This is how to sew on a button; this is how to make a buttonhole for the button you have just sewed on; this 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." The rhythm and repetition create a lyric poetic quality that is present to some degree in all Kincaid’s fiction.

‘Girl’ reads like a list pounded out by the beat of drums, which provides the only comment to the message that, in a world in which ‘ends’ are meant to ‘meet’, girls are ‘bent on becoming sluts’. This is a prelude to the final condemnation of the girl as a slut, not surprising in a story that is almost a ‘chronicle of a slut foretold’. The practice of making ends meet, already discussed in an earlier section of this dissertation, is the primary target of this vigourous critique which manages to expose the very origin of sexual role division - the rational construction of an ideology of symmetry. The ‘uncivilized lack-of-reason’ - the sound of the African drums that beat within the lines - serve as a political commentary, as a cry of protest against the predetermined destiny of the girl. It serves the same function as repetition does in the political essay A Small Place.
‘Girl’ suggests the child’s future on the island, but several stories in the collection re-create the atmosphere of her present existence. The story ‘In the Night’ recounts her daily experiences. Thus, details such as crickets or flowers that would be important to her are recorded, often in the form of lists or catalogs—“...the hibiscus flowers, the flamboyant flowers, the bachelor’s buttons, the irises, the marigolds, the whitehead bush flowers, lilies, the flowers on the daggerbush.” (BR p 10) Here cataloging, a familiar feature of Kincaid’s prose, represents a child’s attempt to impose an order on her surroundings. The young narrator does not question her world but only reports what she observes. Thus witchcraft exists side by side with more mundane activities: “Someone is making a basket, someone is making a girl a dress or a boy a shirt... someone is sprinkling a colorless powder outside a closed door so that someone else’s child will be still born....” (BR p 11)

It is a world of lush growing things, the lilting rhythms of work and play, the dangers of supernatural women called jablesses, and the ghosts of people long gone. This melding of the common place with the supernatural occurs frequently in Kincaid’s fiction. The narrator’s troubles, such as wetting the bed, are those of a child and are easily resolved by her mother. Her plans for the future, marrying a woman who will tell her stories, also are typical of a child. This is an idyllic world in which everything is ordered, listed and catalogued. Nothing is threatening, since the all-powerful mother protects and shields.
In several other stories, including ‘Wingless’ and ‘Holidays’, the girl is again shown to be occupied by the usually pleasant sensations of living: walking barefoot, scratching her scalp, or stretching, but sometimes, as illustrated in ‘Holidays’, experiencing pain, spraining a finger while trying to catch a softball or stepping on dry brambles while walking on newly cut hayfields. The trauma, however, is clearly limited to physical sensations. When the child thinks of the future, the images are those of wishful thinking, similar to day dreams. This tranquil state of youth however, is only temporary, as the title of another story ‘Wingless’ implies. The narrator, wingless, is still in the pupal stage, a chrysalis, awaiting metamorphosis.

The preoccupation with childhood lies at the core of Kincaid’s work and represents a very special achievement. In exploring it, she renews our understanding of the meaning of innocence and the value and possibilities of our first world. A line appears as a prophetic refrain: “First they must be children” (BR p 22), gathering echoes of the New Testament. One must look closely at what Kincaid recognises in this innocence, which is not a state free from stain and imperfection.

Of particular interest is the story ‘Blackness’ in which the disruption of binary oppositions is overwhelming: everything is ambiguous, multiple, fragmented. Blackness is the night that ‘falls in silence’ as well as a colour of skin. But above all it is what cannot be defined - a signifier that escapes its signified by a continuous shifting. It
is identity together with annihilation of the self, a celebration of a narrative ‘I’, who ends its song with the words, ‘I am no longer I.’.

In Kincaid’s testimony, the mother comes to contain and embody the world because of the totality with which the child lives that first relationship with her; and the struggle to be reconciled with her mother containes in embryo, the struggle to be reconciled with life itself. In ‘Blackness’ Kincaid intimates the possibilities and depths of remaining the touch with these sources as she, now a mother, looks through the prism of her own child. The image is, as it were, twice reflected:

“[My child] traces each thing from its meager happenstance beginnings in cool and slimy marsh, to its great glory and dominance of air or land or sea, to its odd remains entombed in mysterious alluviums.... She feels the specter, first cold, then briefly warm, then cold again as it passes from atmosphere to atmosphere. Having observed the many differing physical existences feed on each other, she is beyond despair or the spiritual vacuum.” (BR p 51)

Just like the tourist in A Small Place who is ‘a whole person’ at the price of being “not well equipped to look too far inward”51, the narrator in ‘Blackness’ disrupts the concept of identity as one identity. Like the ambivalence of the mother’s body that is One and Other at the same time (herself and the child she bears), this ‘I’ can say: “...the blackness cannot
be separated from me but often I can stand outside it.” (BR p 46) It is neither the silence of the repressed slave, nor the voice of the Master, because, like the silent voice, ‘conflict is not part of its nature.’ And her child can stand in front of the mirror looking at her skin without colour, while the ‘speaking-voice’ rests in the oxymoron of the ‘silent voice’.

Equally open, fragmentary, multiple and paradoxical is also the frightening ‘I’ in the story ‘Wingless’. It is at the same time unaware, defenseless and pitiful, primitive and wingless, and yet it has the strength to declare: “I shall impose on large numbers of people my will and also, for my own amusement, great pain.” (BR p 22) But the questioning of the unity of the self reaches its climax towards the end of the collection: “I stood as if I were a prism, many-sided and transparent, refracting and reflecting light as it reached me, light that never could be destroyed. And how beautiful I became.” (BR p 80) This is made possible by setting the narrative in the maternal context that blurs the distinction between open and closed, between one and other.

In ‘The Letter from Home’, the narrator’s growing awareness makes it impossible for her to maintain the comforting simplicity of her child’s world. Questions about life and death intrude. These inquiries, however, are set aside in favour of the present physical reality - a cat scratching a chair or a car breaking down. Even love and conception are reduced to the simplest terms. She is not ready to confront the idea of death, so when death beckons, she ‘turned and rowed away’.
Just as the philosophical questions about life and death disrupt the bliss of childhood, so does the journey toward selfhood, which Kincaid symbolically represents as a journey over rough or impassable terrain or water. In ‘What I Have Been Doing Lately’, the obstacle is water:

“I walked for I don’t know how long before I came up to a big body of water. I wanted to get across it but I couldn’t swim. I wanted to get across it but it would take me years to build a boat. I wanted to get across it but it would take I didn’t know how long to build bridge.” (BR p 41)

Because the journey is difficult, as any passage to adulthood would be, the narrator is hesitant, afraid of finding the world not beautiful, afraid of missing her parents, so she goes back to bed: she is not ready yet. Soon, however, she will not have that option of retreating and waiting.

To add one final side to the ‘prism’ of the new self, one could note the insistent refusal to stick to a definitive statement, by going back to the beginning again and again: open-ended post-modern fiction, one could conclude. This story ends where it begins and it re-begins in the middle of its nonlinear movement. The narrator doesn’t know anymore, has no words, no names for her identity, yet she cries out her powerful ‘no’ against the existing order of things.
The journey towards selfhood necessitates a separation from the mother, as is suggested in the story ‘My Mother’. The protection that was vital during childhood becomes stifling in adolescence. Furthermore the girl’s feelings are ambiguous. This story, an outstanding sequence in At The Bottom of the River is the mythologized burden of Annie John. It plots her progress through life in terms of this sense of her mother, to take the form of a journey extending from childhood right into the present struggle for survival. The first piece tells of the painful necessity of being weaned from total dependence on her mother and the submerged tensions and hostilities that entered their relationship from that time.

“Placing her arms around me, she drew my head closer and closer to her bosom, until finally I suffocated. I lay on her bosom, breathless, for a time uncountable, until one day, for a reason she has kept to herself, she shook me out and stood me under a tree and I started to breathe again. I cast a sharp glance at her and said to myself, ‘So.’ Instantly I grew my own bosoms, small mounds at first, leaving a small, soft place between them, where, if ever necessary, I could rest my own head. Between my mother and me now were the tears I had cried, and I gathered up some stones and banked them in so that they formed a small pond. The water in the pond was thick and black and poisonous, so that only unnamable invertebrates could live in it. My mother and I now watched each other carefully, always
making sure to shower the other with words and deeds of love and affection.” (BR p 53,54)

The strange movement of imagery here is remarkably direct and literal in its impact: it is almost as if the feelings and incidents she recalls actually registered in that way. This particular piece has been quoted at length because it gives a clear insight into the underlying sources and dynamics of Kincaid’s style, especially in At the Bottom of the River. We are taken with childlike simplicity and spontaneous fantasy into what emerges as the dream-scape of the subconscious. Images and fragments from favourite children’s stories and strong personal symbols from Kincaid’s childhood, surface in the memory of that experience. Thus, the pond of tears separating her from her mother is reminiscent of Alice’s ‘Pool of tears’, in Alice in Wonderland; while the image of being sent out to eat her dinner under the breadfruit tree whenever she was being punished, is reflective of a similar scene in Annie John. These images hark back to the child’s original acceptance of the world of fantasy and symbol. One factor is of special significance here. The climate of local superstition and obeah practices in which Kincaid grew up had a lasting influence in deepening these impulses towards the fantastical. These extend, increasingly as the sequence unfolds, into the surreal accesses of dream.

The all-protecting mother of the earlier stories transforms herself into a mythic monster and thus threatens the emerging selfhood of the
daughter. The daughter, however, also grows ‘invincible’, like her mother.

Only after the daughter completes her own journey towards selfhood is her mother no longer a threat: “... as we walked along, our steps became one, and as we talked, our voices became one voice, and we were in complete union in every way. What peace came over me then, for I could not see where she left off and I began, or where I left off and she began....” (BR p 60)

Finally she finds her way to an envisioned reconciliation with her mother, evoked in this paradisal movement:

“My mother and I live in a bower made from flowers whose petals are imperishable. There is the silvery blue of the sea, crisscrossed with sharp darts of light, there is the warm rain falling on the clumps of castor bush, there is the small lamb bounding across the pasture, there is the soft ground welcoming the soles of my pink feet. It is in this way my mother and I have lived for a long time now.” (BR p 61)

The child-mother relationship thus deepens into an ultimate significance in Kincaid’s imagination. It is a paradigm of the struggle between the self and the mother, the tug between the yearning for
completion and all outside us that seem to resist it, provoking, as Kincaid tells us, the will to master or be mastered. Beneath this struggle lies the final need for union. Kincaid’s journey thus recovers an aesthetic mythic level in ‘My Mother’: the loss of innocence and security, initiation into experience, and the struggle to regain that innocence.

The concluding and title story is also the longest in the collection, at about twenty pages. ‘At the bottom of the River’ suggests answers to the questions raised in the other stories. Again Kincaid employs the symbol of a journey through forbidding terrain to suggest travelling through life. What is the purpose of the journey, for, what does one ultimately face but death? One man, overwhelmed, does nothing. Another discovers meaning in his family, his work, and the beauty of a sunrise, but still, he struggles and ‘feels the futility’. How can one live with the paralysing knowledge that “Dead lay everything that had lived and dead also lay everything that would live. All had had or would have its season. And what should it matter that its season lasted five billion years of five minutes?” (BR p 68)

One possible response is suggested in the life of a small creature that lives in the moment, aware only of the sensation of grass underfoot or the sting of a honeybee.

The narrator, who at first knew only the love of her mother, suffers from its necessary withdrawal. Adrift, she embarks on a symbolic journey in which she submerges herself in a river-fed sea. Discovering a
solution at the bottom of the river, she emerges with a commitment to the present. Death, because it is natural, cannot be destroyed, but the joys derived from the commonplace - books, chairs, fruit - can provide meaning. She thus finds the strength to escape annihilation, in a strong and yet un-authoritative voice that concludes the whole collection: "... how bound up I know I am to all that is human endeavor, to all that is past and to all that shall be, to all that shall be lost and leave no trace. I claim these things then - mine - and now feel myself grow solid and complete, my name filling up my mouth." (BR p 82)

Kincaid's novel Lucy is spun woven with paradoxes. In many ways, Lucy may appear to begin from where Annie John concludes. This latest fiction of Kincaid chronicles the arrival of a nineteen year old woman from a small West Indian island to the United States of America where she takes employment as a nanny. It is significant, in fact that instead of travelling to England the imperial motherland, Lucy has journeyed to America, its contemporary rival.

For Lucy, her arrival in the United States is not to be the entry into Eden, or opportunity for personal genesis, which she had anticipated. Instead she enters a land which is situated, both seasonally and morally, after the fall. America, in its wintering phase, presents profound disappointment to Lucy who had dreamt of a land where "all these places were points of happiness to me; all these places were lifeboats to my small drowning soul." (Lu. p 3) Lucy has been betrayed by colonial indoctrination into believing the imperial narrative which couples
‘discovery’ of a land with self-discovery. Yet, even her body language articulates the ambivalence which she experiences at the moment of arrival in America: “at first it was all so new that I had to smile with my mouth turned down at the corners.” (Lu. p 4)

As the narrative develops and Lucy’s new life as an au pair to four children in a white, middle-class, nuclear family - who represent the crumbling façade of American civility and liberalism - unfolds, it becomes evident that she has not, after all, arrived in any personal sense. Rather than being an act by which to forget and to separate past from future, Lucy’s arrival only serves to heighten her awareness of herself as exile. “Oh, I had imagined that with one swift act - leaving home and coming to this new place - I could have behind me, as if it were an old garment never to be worn again, my sad thoughts, my sad feelings, and my discontent with life in general as it presented itself to me.” (Lu. p 6,7)

The binary opposition collapses, neither exile nor arrival are complete, and, as migrant and minority, Lucy is left without belonging. America in indeed a poor shadow of her dream.

In a text which constantly denies us the happy endings which feed our cultural imaginations, it is made explicit that the closure or fulfillment of that old colonial tale which depicts the ‘other’ land as the site on which to achieve aspirations and desires inaccessible at home, is still dependent upon economic and social power. The dinner party guests of Lucy’s employers had been, seen and consummated their fantasies of fun and
frolics on ‘the islands’, but journeying in the opposite direction, she is not so comfortably accommodated in their new environs. Although warmly embraced by the family, for whom she works, Lucy remains acutely aware of her positioning within all structures of American society, including the home.

“The room in which I lay was a small room just off the kitchen - the maid’s room. I was used to a small room, but this was a different sort of small room. The ceiling was very high and the walls went all the way up to the ceiling, enclosing the room like a box - a box in which cargo traveling a long way should be shipped. But I was not cargo. I was only an unhappy young woman living in a maid’s room, and I was not even the maid.” (Lu. p 7)

While the spatial configuration of Lucy’s room evidently denotes containment, it more specifically evokes the iconography of the slave ship in which the captured Africans were transported as slaves across the ocean to America. This representation is suggestive of the fact that Lucy’s respectable position of service as a nanny is a not so distant echo of her ancestors’ enforced servitude in this land.

Yet as the reality of American society intrudes upon Lucy’s dream, so other dreams begin to intrude upon her reality. The subsumed slave narrative emerges most dramatically within Lucy’s dreams, one which
she relates to her employers, Lewis and Mariah, one evening at the dinner table.

“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.” (Lu. p 14)

Images of plantation life and slave capture emerge alongside that of the yellow brick road to present a montage of the colliding and conflicting message within this ambivalently informed cultural imagination. The conflation of seemingly opposing cultural signifiers, of desired future and denied past, of hope and fear, signals the complex matrix of competing claims within a migrant consciousness informed by both metropolitan expectations and ancestral histories.

As well as revealing the America of oppression buried beneath the dream of the land of the free, Lucy’s dream and the response of her American employers to it, “Lewis made a clucking noise, then said, poor, poor Visitor. And Mariah said, Dr. Freud for Visitor, and I wondered why she said that, for I did not know who Dr. Freud was....” (Lu. p 15) point to
the way in which Kincaid's fiction foregrounds the limitations of Western theoretical models. While the heavily inscribed Freudian imagery of holes and snakes might seem to invite or endorse this reading, the images of running naked and of cornmeal clearly signify that cultural difference and conflict are also primary determinants within this consciousness. The denial of issues of cultural difference in the development of psychoanalytic theory means that the proposed Dr. Freud would be, at best, an inadequate model through which to interpret the dreams of an adolescent Caribbean female. Evidently the cultural context of the Caribbean, makes the baffling nature of the already 'dark continent' of the female sexuality, even more inaccessible to Freudian interpretation.

In terms of the theorising narrative, the depiction of Lucy's dream collapses or de-constructs the space which Western theory often seeks to construct between ideas of cultural difference and sexual difference, in order to present the way in which these two models of differentiation are intimately bound within the construction of a female post-colonial subjectivity. It is this same denial of cultural difference which also necessitates Lucy's resistance to the discourse of Anglo-American feminism within the novel. Mariah, Lucy's supposedly liberal and liberated white employer, who constructs her as the 'poor visitor' and in need of rescue, attempts to offer her this through the supposedly more authentic voice of a feminist language.
Mariah left the room and came back with a large book and opened it to the first chapter. She gave it to me. I read the first sentence. ‘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.’ I had to stop. Mariah had completely misinterpreted my situation. My life could not really be explained by this thick book that made my hands hurt as I tried to keep it open. My life was at once something more simple and more complicated that that....” (Lu. p 132)

To Lucy, the text is meaningless and burdensome as it refuses context. Lucy must reject the language of the surrogate mother because it rejects her specific cultural and historical positioning. The language of the text, like that of Mariah herself, speaks to middle class white women, with little awareness of its exclusivity. The generalised statements concerning gender, which Mariah’s feminism advocates, do not correlate to the cultural differences between women which Lucy has already observed.

Although one would not wish to deny the very real marginalisation which the novel clearly reveals, that Lucy does experience as a woman within her home society, her Caribbean cultural heritage is clearly womanist / feminist both in ethos and in practice. Baffled by American women’s obsessions with ageing and beauty, Lucy asserts her own code which confidently articulates a positive female subjectivity: “Among the
beliefs I held about the world was that being beautiful should not matter to a woman, because it was one of those things that would go away, and there wouldn’t be anything you could do to bring it back.” (Lu. p 57)

From her childhood in the Caribbean, Lucy has also learnt of the herbal aids to abortion from her mother and thus is in possession of one of the primary objectives of the early American women’s movement - control over fertility. Moreover, her Caribbean upbringing has installed into Lucy the significance of solidarity amongst women: “It was my mother who told me that I should never take a man’s side over a woman’s…. It was from her own experience that she spoke.” (Lu. p 48)
As well as exposing the alienating ethnocentric bias of a certain type of Anglo-American feminism, Lucy’s simple statements seem to suggest that within Caribbean women’s lives theory and practice are not discrete, as Kincaid juxtaposes gender politics which are to be lived with those which are to be argued.

Here, and throughout the novel, Lucy’s thoughts and dreams testify to the ways in which certain intellectual spaces still remain colonised within Western thought. It is Mariah who is trapped within the monologic narrative, unable to negotiate the differences between language and living, and self and other, not Lucy. It becomes clear that the narratives of opportunity and belonging (of having arrived) and of liberation (here through feminism) have been trans-culturally marketed in versions which are deeply ethnocentric, and exclusive, and which, moreover, with a certain cultural complacency, deny the co-existence of
alternative models, such as those which Lucy brings with her from the Caribbean.

However, as well as revealing the cultural biases and blind spots within existing theoretical models, Kincaid’s novel also explores the basis upon which we evaluate, by rehearsing the way in which we judge our notions of the aesthetic and the ideological. This process is staged most crucially within the narrative when Mariah initiates Lucy into the joys of spring by telling her of a field of daffodils.

“She [Mariah] said, ‘Have you ever seen daffodils pushing their way up out of the ground? And when they’re in bloom and all massed together, a breeze comes along and makes them do a curtsey to the lawn stretching out in front of them. Have you ever seen that? When I see that, I feel so glad to be alive.’ And I thought, So Mariah is made to feel alive by some flowers.... How does a person get to be that way? I remembered an old poem I had been made to memorize when I was ten years old and a pupil at Queen Victoria Girls’ School. I had been made to memorize it verse after verse, and then had recited the whole poem to an auditorium full of parents, teachers, and my fellow pupils. After I was done, everybody stood up and applauded with an enthusiasm that surprised me, and later they 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, and how proud the poet, now long dead, would have been to hear his words ringing out of my mouth.... And so I made pleasant 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.”

(Lu. p 17,18)

Mariah’s admiration for this seemingly simple field of flowers acts as a powerful catalyst for Lucy’s memories of cultural imperialism. What is essentially an aesthetic experience for Mariah constitutes a powerful ideological situation for Lucy. Her retrospective vision of reciting Wordsworth’s poem works as both a literal example of colonial education and as a metonym for the colonial apparatus’ promotion of an aesthetic which is ideologically motivated in its very essence of seeming to be devoid of ideology. ‘Daffodils’ was promoted pedagogically as an apolitical text and yet becomes highly politicised when analysed within the colonial context in which Kincaid places it. The poetic subject (Daffodils) signifies the forced adoption of the motherland and the attendant suppression of difference. In addition, the process of learning by heart further supports the hegemony’s underlying need for mimicry which, Lucy, as a schoolgirl, publicly performs but privately attempts to negate.
Her double consciousness, or two-facedness as she calls it, is testimony to her ambivalent position as black and female in relation to colonial cultural authority, which is represented by the poem, the poet, and the institution of the school. By appearing to subscribe to the version of aesthetics pedagogically promoted, but internally reacting against it, Lucy has clearly politicised and resisted the stifling appropriation of a culturally inauthentic voice. Indeed, when Mariah at last takes her to see the daffodils, which she had so carefully and painfully eulogized as a young girl, Lucy’s reaction is a spontaneous and most vehement desire to cut them all down: “It wasn’t her fault. It wasn’t my fault.... But nothing could change the fact that where she saw beautiful flowers I saw sorrow and bitterness. The same thing could cause us to shed tears, but those tears would not taste the same. We walked home in silence.” (Lu. p 30)

Although Mariah’s and Lucy’s bewilderment at the situation may be mutual, from her analysis of their conflicting responses, it is evident that Lucy experiences and comprehends the politics of cultural difference in a way her American employer cannot.

Nevertheless, within the narrative, Lucy does attempt to communicate to Mariah the consequences of cultural and historical positioning upon ways of seeing. On a very American train journey, Mariah again attempts to invite Lucy into the beauty of her world:

“Early that morning, Mariah left her own compartment to come and tell me that we were passing through some
of those freshly plowed fields she loved so much. She drew up my blind, and when I saw mile after mile of turned-up earth, I said, a cruel tone to my voice, ‘Well, thank God I didn’t have to do that.’ I don’t know if she understood what I meant, for in that one statement I meant many different things.” (Lu. p 33)

As before, aesthetic and ideological are revealed as relative states. In this instance, Lucy’s historical affiliation is with labour which ploughed the fields, whereas Mariah’s is with those of leisure, and thus visual pleasure. While the politics of this situation may seem clear to us, this perception cannot be so confidently assumed by Lucy, for whom the task of communicating across a widening cultural chasm is deeply problematic.

For Lucy, the only way out of seeing ‘hundreds of years in every gesture, every word spoken, every face’ is to put distance between herself and things, to avoid all emotional involvement. In the same way she keeps away from her mother, whose love has become a ‘burden’ because she wants to make her daughter into an echo of her. As already seen in Kincaid’s previous fiction, At the Bottom of the River and Annie John, the mother / daughter relationship is metonymic of the colonial condition, a paradigm of the struggle between the self and the other. As the author herself put it in an interview:
“I’ve come to see that I have worked through the relationship of the mother and the girl to a relationship between Europe and the place I’m from, which is to say, a relationship between the powerful and the powerless. The girl is powerless and the mother is powerful.... So it’s not unlike the relationship between the conquered and the conqueror.”

Lucy’s will to achieve freedom from her colonial heritage and love/hate bond[age] to her mother dictates the behaviour she adopts in her voyage into the Western world. “Very crucial to understanding Lucy is her name. Of her full name Lucy Josephine Potter, Lucy is the only part the heroine really cares about, the other two being related in some way to slavery. Although Lucy first appears to her as a name ‘without substance’ she comes to appreciate it when she realizes that Lucy is short for Lucifer. Learning that she was named after Satan himself, Lucy comments: “I was transformed from failure to triumph. It was the moment I knew who I was.” (Lu. p 152) Lucy is clearly aware of the subversive quality of this name from her reading of Paradise Lost and the Bible. But for the reader, the apparently commonplace name also carries a load of ambivalent connotations that are a measure of the ambiguities bequeathed by Lucy’s colonial past.

Caribbean novels abound in examples of the alienating nature of colonial education: The teacher in Lamming’s In the Castle of my Skin who dismisses the existence of slavery or Ralph Singh’s teacher in
Naipaul’s *The Mimic Men* who makes his pupils believe that the real world is in a traffic jam in Liege, or in *Myal*, a novel by Erna Brodber, where the main character has to learn Kipling’s ‘The White Man’s Burden’ by heart, which Helen Tiffin pinpoints as an example of “interpellated colonial subjects proudly witnessing against themselves from a British perspective.” The last line of the first stanza of that poem describes the colonised as ‘half devil and half child’.

Clearly, by opting for the ‘devilish’ rather than the ‘childish’ Lucy lives up to the more prestigious prejudice of the two, at least the one that leaves her pride unharmed and allows her more independence. But, ‘Lucy’ is ironically also the title of the much hated Daffodils, suggesting that Lucy cannot really escape colonial tutelage, and in some way also belongs to Wordsworth’s world, whether she wants to or not. Last but not least, the name ‘Lucy’ has now become famous as the first female human fossil that was found 1974 in Ethiopia, a kind of African eve challenging the Euro-imposed biblical ancestor who, with Lucifer, was said to be responsible for the loss of paradise.

Lucy’s voyage is, of course, also a confrontation with a different system of apprehending reality. In the Caribbean world of her childhood, opposites could exist side by side and there was no such things as a real thing, because often what seemed to be one thing turned out to be altogether different. The western world, on the contrary, has a monolithic nature that accounts for its hegemony, but also its frailty. Mariah’s ideal and closely united family impresses Lucy, but collapses like a house of
cards, whereas Lucy’s informal family circle endures better, in spite of violence and mobility. The disintegration of Mariah’s marriage leads Lucy to ponder, while looking through the family album, on the mechanism of historical records that, as was the case for the history of colonisation and slavery, often leave out the most significant details and, under the pretense of comprehensiveness and objectivity, operate a purely subjective selection.

In the process of self-discovery that goes hand in hand with her exploration of another world, Lucy proceeds undogmatically:

“But the things I could not see about myself, the things I could not put my hands on - those things had changed, and I did not yet know them well. 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 scientist. I could not count on precision or calculation; I could only count on intuition. I did not have anything exactly in mind, but when the picture was complete I would know.” (Lu. p 134)

She also resists the totalising trend of the new world which, for example, keeps referring to the West Indies as the islands, but rarely bothers from what island she comes. Significantly too, Lucy rejects the wholesale theorizing about herself that Mariah presents her with, through Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex.*
The novel ends with Lucy crying over what she has started writing in a note book given to her by Mariah, again the colonized inheriting from the colonizer the means to express herself. But things are different now. The final ‘big blur’ on the page encompasses the numerous overlappings and dismantlings of traditional categories which recur in the novel and match the motif of the deceptiveness of appearances.

One of the most telling examples of this is built around the figure of the painter Paul Gauguin and suggests that Lucy, like Columbus himself, is at once agent and subject of discovery. Lucy identifies with the French painter’s devilish search for edenic independence. In a way similar to the artist portraying the inhabitants of the tropics, she takes on the hobby of taking pictures of people walking on the street. But in turn she is herself the prey of someone else’s artistic exploration. Indeed, her boyfriend, also an artist named Paul, take a picture of her in which she strangely looks like one of Ganguin’s vahines. “That was the moment he got the idea he possessed me in a certain way, and that was the moment I grew tired of him....” (Lu. p 155) comments Lucy, who has come full circle from being a colonial subject to being an artistic/sexual one.

Western intrusion in the New World meant, among other things, the imposition of writing on essentially oral civilizations, a very ambivalent legacy. Lucy illustrates the potentially hegemonic qualities of the written world: The Bible taught, poems with a northern slant imposed, or even Lucy’s mother’s letters are cases in point. But, by denouncing the abuse of language as a means of taking control of the other and by disrupting
the established colonial order on which the dominance of the written word relies for its effectiveness, the novel testifies that writing combined with imagination can also be a powerful tool of resistance.

The aporia which divides Lucy and Mariah testifies to the culturally constructed nature of value systems and therefore questions the whole basis upon which we make judgements about ourselves, each other, and literary values. By re-presenting and unravelling the politics of certain national and intellectual narratives, Kincaid reveals that a Caribbean or a post-colonial female subjectivity is too complex to be articulated simply by feminist or colonial discourse theories or by national allegories, all of which are too often predicated on a belief that the ‘other’ can easily be understood by the methodologies constructed by the self in order to ‘discover’ difference, and which further have a tendency to theorize that ‘other’ into the self.

By arguing for a more complex subjectivity, both syncretic and shifting, Kincaid’s novel Lucy not only offers a compelling and engaging presentation of the Caribbean migrant consciousness, but it also makes us question our confidence in making judgements which fail to encompass a consideration of cultural and gender orientation, although it very clearly does not deny the significance of working through the process of cross-cultural communication.
ENDNOTES

References to the following texts in this chapter will be as under

Talking of Trees - TT
Summer Lightning & Other Stories - SL
Arrival of the Snake Woman and other Stories - ASW
Annie John - AJ
At The Bottom Of The River - BR
Lucy - Lu


9. ibid., p. 24


13. Rodman, Hyman, Lower Class Families: The Culture of Poverty in Negro Trinidad, OUP, 1971, pp. 177, 178


18. ibid, p. 3

19. Note: The WICP devised the concept of ‘sources of livelihood’ to better explain the varied sources women tap for support, and to extend the notions of ‘work’ and ‘labour’ beyond wage labour.


21. Note: A title of an anthology of women’s writing from the Caribbean, 1989

23. Rhys, Jean, Voyage in the Dark, New York: 1934 p. 4


30. ibid., p. 14


32. ibid., p. 202


36. ibid., p. 85


38. ibid., p. 62

40. ibid., p. 213


42. ibid., p. 165

43. ibid., pp. 155, 156

44. Abruna, Laura Niesen de, 'Family Connections: Mother and Mother Country in the Fiction of Jean Rhys and Jamaica Kincaid', in Nasta, ed., p. 278

45. Note: Title of an Anthology by Una Marson, 1932.


47. Kincaid, Jamaica, Interview with Hillary De Vries, Christian Science Monitor, 2nd May, 1985, p. 41

49. ibid. p.1


51. ibid., p. 16


53. Tiffin, Helen, 'Decolonization and Audience: Erna Brodber’s *Myal* and Jamaica Kincaid’s *A Small Place’*, *SPAN*, No. 30, April 1990, p. 31