

Postcolonial Interpretation of the Symbolic in Jamaica Kincaid's *My Mother and Girl*.

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Abstract: This paper probes the symbolic in Jamaica Kincaid's short stories, *My Mother and Girl*. Its premise is that writers of Caribbean extract often deploy elements of symbolism to portray the peculiarities of their postcolonial experience and to express socio-cultural realities that may not be adequately explored by other means. This feature, therefore, necessitates a close and rigorous study of Caribbean writings to discover meanings communicated through symbolic characters, settings, atmospheric conditions and narrative undertones among others. This study, therefore, explores the historical and cultural experiences in the stories to highlight the socio-cultural dilemma and other historical complexities that shape the character of the Caribbean society. Using postcolonial theory as a critical compass, this paper is a library study through textual analysis and consultation of secondary sources to explore the content of the stories. The study concludes, therefore, that the use of symbolism in Caribbean literature, especially the short stories, is fitting and expedient to facilitate the depiction of the atypical range of experiences that shape Caribbean characters and which distinguishes them from other postcolonial societies. Further, the study shows that the writer succeeds, through the postcolonial experiences she explores, in communication her artistic vision to draw attention to the cultural limbo that is the lot of Caribbean characters.

Introduction: Status of Caribbean Literature

The choice of what approach to adopt in studying Caribbean literature is not an easy one to make. First, there is little agreement even among scholars from the area on the status of Caribbean (or West Indian) literature. This identity crisis is inevitable considering that the area known as the Caribbean is not inhabited by people with a common ancestry; rather, it is made up of a group of islands that are by no means considered equal either geopolitically or culturally. Caribbean Literature is associated with all works emanating from the whole islands in the Caribbean irrespective of their language or the European power that colonized them. Often, English-speaking islands in the Caribbean colonised by Britain which include Jamaica, Trinidad, Tobago, Barbados, the Leeward Islands and the Windward islands are called West Indian. This clarification, however, in no way obviates the current trend to refer to works originating from the Caribbean area of the world as *Caribbean* or *West Indian* depending on the title the scholar involved finds more fanciful. Still, a knotty aspect of the controversy, according to Lloyd Brown, is the lumping together of literary products from the Caribbean as if it were produced by persons of same nationality. He observes that "What has always been indeterminate has been the basis on which we have traditionally assigned the corporate identity of a single national literature . . . to writings from territories which have always fostered a sense of separateness" (411).

Another prominent element of Caribbean literature is its nexus with the history of the islands. The interface between the two is often given significant focus because no fruitful

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characteristic of postcolonial writings, its significance is more pronounced in the Caribbean where history and literature explore common themes. Martin Munro eloquently captures the pervasive character of this feature in his study on Caribbean and Haitian history. He declares that:

It has become a critical orthodoxy to talk of Caribbean history in terms of loss, emptiness and lack. Across diverse intellectual movements and inter-island linguistic boundaries, the shared past of transportation, slavery and colonialism has time and again been interpreted as a kind of break with history itself, leaving in its wake only voids and silences. (20)

However, it is at the end of his study that he makes a more definite declaration that “Literature and history in Haiti have for two centuries fed off each other; history has become poetry and fiction, and poetry and fiction have become history” (34).

Another contentious issue in the study of Caribbean Literature is the suitable mode that can engage and address fruitfully the historical and cultural realities of the nationalities of the islands. To circumvent the obvious obstacles inherent in any pursuit to justify the homogeneity of all Caribbean peoples, scholars often concentrate on methods that explore historical and cultural realities common to the islands rather than the peoples. To Brown, the common ones never fail to probe “three recurrent themes in the literature: black protest and nationalism, multiracial images, and exile” (411). Multiracial images and exile are major issues Kincaid explores in her fiction as she examines the impact of postcolonial wounds and cultural scars etched on the psyche of her protagonists.

Concept and Theory of Postcolonialism

A study of the literature of a society is most enlightening and gainful when it is appraised with a critical tool that does not negate its value or significance as a cultural artefact even before the first word is read. The emergence of postcolonial theory as a fitting approach to critiquing literary products of former colonies of the West, especially those in Africa and the Caribbean, is informed by the obvious inadequacies of modes that originated from the colonizing enclaves. Many of its major proponents, which include Chinua Achebe, Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, Kamau Brathwaite, Gayatri Spivak, Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin and Edward Said to mention just a few, set out to challenge the stories of the colonized told by the colonizer and strive for literary space at the centre away from the periphery. Gregory Castle enunciates not only the linkage that makes the theory appropriate, but the significance of the label, postcolonial:

The emergence of postcolonial studies is tied to a number of factors, the most important of which is the relation of postcolonial nations to colonialism and the colonial era. Hence the prefix ‘post-’ refers to a historical relation, to a period after colonialism. . . . [However], the historical relation alone is insufficient to describe the meaning of this ‘post-’. The title of Kwame Anthony Appiah’s influential essay – “Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?” (1991) – implies that the significance of the term *postcolonial* extends beyond the historical relation of colonialism to include other times, themes, and discourses” (135)

The term postcolonial, in current scholarship, qualifies a theory (postcolonial theory) and a literary field (postcolonial literature) depending on the thrust of the discourse where it is deployed. Rose Murfin and Supriya Ray’s perspective adequately explains the domains of each usage; a view this study adopts as a premise:

Postcolonial literature refers to a body of literature written by authors with roots in countries that were once colonies established by European nations, whereas postcolonial theory refers to a field of intellectual enquiry that explores and interrogates the situation of colonized peoples both during and after colonization. . . . Critical readings of postcolonial literature regularly proceed under the overt influence of postcolonial theory, which raises historical, cultural, political and moral issues surrounding the establishment and disintegration of colonies and empires they fuelled. (394-395)

Like other critical models before it, postcolonial theory has engendered so much debate among critics with many aligning themselves for or against its appropriateness and effectiveness. This is not unexpected considering the factors that brought it into being. It was a response to, or rather, a defence against canonical postulations that construct the colonized as inferior races. Expectedly, many of the strident voices intent on discrediting it are the very ones that labour to uphold the status quo before its emergence. A fresh impetus for this cynicism is ‘globalization’. Peter Kalliney, in his study of East African literature, cites two antagonists of the theory who believe it has outlived its usefulness, and immediately voices his disappointment that postcolonial proponents did not respond with equal gusto:

“In *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue that postcolonial theory has reached an impasse because it fails to grasp, much less adequately critique, the emerging system of world sovereignty commonly called globalization. . . . While its practitioners continue pointing to hybridity as a strategy of resistance, the forces of global power have happily incorporated the celebration of cultural difference into new disciplinary structures. . . . Postcolonialists have [however] offered a surprisingly muted reply, effectively ceding the discourse of contemporary world politics and cultures to critics of globalization. (298)

There are other critics that struggle to discredit the theory by claiming that it has deviated from a cultural theory into a political agenda. They couch their intent by lumping it together with other contemporary theories they equally find moribund in a globalized world. Theo D’haen exemplifies this when he asserts that:

Postmodernism, postcolonialism and multiculturalism were primarily phenomena of a cultural nature that sought to recalibrate the canon of world literature each from its own perspective. Of course, this is not to claim that they were unrelated to political and social developments beyond the realm of literature – in fact, especially postcolonialism and multiculturalism definitely had a political agenda” (25).

Postcolonialism, as a subject matter, is also not without controversy in its definition, the geographic space it ought to cover and the period it should address. Pius Adesanmi’s view on the issue clearly informs Castle’s clarification above on the argument provoked by the *post* in postcolonialism. He observes that:

The problem [of postcolonialism] is occasioned by the semantic implication of the prefix ‘post’ which, if unproblematized, tends to imply a linear structuring of the time of the other as something that becomes significant only after a supposed overcoming of colonialism. The questions – when is the postcolonial? Where does it begin? – have been posed to the point of iterative superfluity. (38)

However, in spite of these challenges and Kalliney’s disappointment that postcolonial critics have not been vociferous enough in responding to criticism, the literary landscape is

replete with seminal views that explicate the rationale behind the theory. No better view captures the essence of postcolonialism than that of Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin:

Postcolonial literary theory emerges from the inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of postcolonial writing. European theories themselves emerge from particular cultural traditions which are hidden by false notions of ‘the universal.’ Theories of style and genre, assumptions about the universal features of language, epistemologies and value systems are all radically questioned by the practices of postcolonial writing. (11)

Postcolonial theory has proven to be a veritable platform for scholars to interrogate hegemonic postulations that question the quality of cultural products from outside Europe and America, or the talent of the artists themselves. Beyond that, it has been deployed over the years to conduct holistic cultural, psychological and political studies of works that were read differently before its emergence. For example, Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* has been studied from a postcolonial perspective by so many scholars that it has become difficult to keep count of them. Some more recent ones include Gerlinde Didea’s *Postcolonial Theory in William Shakespeare’s The Tempest* (2009), Paulus Sarwoto’s *The Figuration of Caliban in the Constellation of Postcolonial Theory* (2009) and Ravi Bhorkar’s *A Postcolonial view of The Tempest and its Afterlives* (2012). The theory continues to throw up fresh perspectives on literary works when rigorously applied. Its attractiveness, according to Lois Tyson, lies in its effectiveness “at helping us see connections among all domains of our experience – psychological, ideological, social, political, intellectual, and aesthetic – in ways that show us just how inseparable these categories are in our lived experience of ourselves and our world” (417).

In the same vein, Meyer Howard Abrams and Geoffrey Harpham see it as an appropriate platform to appraise works originating from former colonies of European imperial powers (245). To Hans Bertens, “postcolonial theory and criticism emphasize the tension between the metropolis and the (former) colonies, between what within the colonial framework were the metropolitan, imperial centre and its colonial satellites” (159). However, Terry Eagleton strives to strike a balance between the two extremes, though he eventually expresses opinions that clearly show on which side he stands. He observes that:

Like feminism and postmodernism, and unlike phenomenology and reception theory, post-colonial theory is directly rooted in historical developments Like any other theory, then, postcolonial discourse has its limits and blind spots. It has sometimes involved a romantic idealization of the ‘other’ along with a simplistic politics which regards the reduction of the ‘other’ to the ‘same’ as the root of all political evil. This particular postmodern theme, of otherness and self-identity, is by now itself threatening to become drearily self-identical. An alternative brand of post-colonial thought, in deconstructing any too rigid opposition between colonizing self and colonized other, ends up stressing their mutual implication and so risks blunting the political cutting edge of an anti-colonialist critique. For all its emphasis on difference, post-colonial theory has sometimes too quickly conflated very different societies under the same ‘Third World’ category; and its language has too often betrayed a portentous obscurantism incongruously remote from the peoples it champions. [However], [s]ome of the theory has been genuinely path-breaking (204-06)

Notion of Symbolism

Symbolism in literature is connected with representation and meaning. According to Ross Murfin and Supriya Ray, a symbol is:

Something that, although it is of interest in its own right, stands for or suggests something larger and more complex; often an idea or a range of interrelated ideas, attitudes and practices . . . [It] may thus be defined more specifically in a literary sense as a figure in which the vehicle – the image, activity, or concept used to represent something else – represents more than one thing (or tenor) and is broadly suggestive, having both literal and figurative significance. (504)

It is in this sense that it is used in this study, especially the aspect that defines a symbol as something whose meaning operates at two levels: the obvious and the implied. Murfin and Ray expound further that, symbolism “may refer to an author’s explicit use of a particular symbol in a literary work; the presence of, in a work or body of works, of suggestive associations giving rise to incremental, implied meaning; or the creation of subjective, or ‘private’ symbol systems unique to a given author” (506). In the same vein, Abrams and Harpham say that “a symbol is applied only to a word or phrase that signifies an object or event which in turn signifies something, or suggests a range of reference, beyond itself” (358).

Kincaid’s stories explore the cultural and psychological dilemma that asphyxiates her protagonists and their struggles to assert their self-identities. Their struggles to transcend their socio-psychological conditions by discovering, repudiating, but later re-identifying with their historical and cultural past, nearly destroy them before they realize that they cannot escape their past. Their efforts to assert their individuality, and at the same time integrate with the society in which they find themselves, result in a multiple existence, a condition Homi Bhabha calls “unhomeliness” (1994) and Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffins describe as “hybridity” (2002). Impelled by this condition, they turn rebellious against their symbolic mothers in the stories to a point where the protagonist of *My Mother* attempts matricide. The consequence is inevitable: she suffers alienation and becomes a lost soul, the fate that awaits all “victim[s] of Eurocentric thought, attitudes, politics, exploitation and other unwarranted intrusions” (Bertens 159).

Linked to this condition of hybridity is Stuart Hall’s theory of *diasporic identities* in which he claims that Caribbean peoples experience cultural identity “as an enigma, as a problem, as an open question” (286). He asserts that:

Everybody [in the Caribbean] comes from somewhere else. . . . That is to say, their true cultures, the places they really came from, the traditions that really formed them, are somewhere else. . . . [I]n the histories of the migration, forced or free, of peoples who now compose the populations of these societies, whose cultural traces are everywhere intermingled with one another, there is always the stamp of historical violence and rupture. (283-84)

The effect of the ‘violence and rupture’ is obvious in the attitude and outlook of the characters in Kincaid’s stories. The turbulence in their minds as they strive to contain several impulses threatening, seeking cracks in the walls of their silence to explode even at the price of destroying all that define them in their society. To appreciate, therefore, the dilemma in which the protagonists find themselves in the stories, *My Mother* and *Girl*, like much of Caribbean Literature, must be read against the background of physical and psychological dislocation of Caribbean peoples through slavery and colonization. This is why the problem of self-identity is central to Caribbean literature. The cultural limbo in which the protagonist of *My Mother* finds herself is so stifling that, in desperation, she plots to destroy the only reality that gives her a

sense of humanity and history, her mother. The experience is not uncommon in postcolonial stories; but what separates *My Mother* and *Girl* from others of their kind is Kincaid's deliberate expression of the common through the symbolic in order to reveal the depth of despair of 'lost souls.'

Identifying and Interpreting the Symbolic in *My Mother* and *Girl*

The central symbol in the two stories is 'the mother.' In them, Kincaid presents the Caribbean character as a child who needs the guidance and directives of the parent to make her way in the world. Her choice of the mother, rather than the father, is informed by two considerations: the mother is often closer to the child in its adolescent years, and raising the girl child is usually the duty of the mother. The protagonists of the two stories are girls.

On the surface, *My Mother* is a power struggle between a girl and her mother. However, a close reading shows a complex web of symbolic imagery and allusions. The girl, who is the narrator of the story, struggles to liberate herself from the influence of her powerful mother, a conflict that generates much hatred in the girl for her mother. The opening lines of *My Mother* are deliberately shocking and launch the reader into a labyrinth of symbolic representations that task the mind to apprehend the meaning of the story or where it is headed. However, what stands out in the maze of imagery is the unshakable love of the mother for her child and the recalcitrant character of the latter:

Immediately on wishing my mother dead and seeing the pain it caused her, I was sorry and cried so many tears that all the earth around me was drenched. Standing before my mother, I begged her forgiveness, and I begged so earnestly that she took pity on me, kissing my face and placing my head on her bosom to rest. 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. (518)

The ensuing struggle between the protagonist and her mother is a mystical pilgrimage for the former who recounts her psychological struggles to sever her ties with her past. This past is represented by her culture with its gods, beliefs, customs and world outlook. She, therefore, represents the average Caribbean who, transplanted from one world to another, struggles to divest herself from the cloak of the old culture which is a vital part of her humanity. The mother symbolises this culture and plays the role, not only by sustaining her biologically as a mother supports her child, but also by keeping watch over her like a spiritual sentinel wherever she goes. Although the story begins with the protagonist's condemnation and rejection of the mother, she, however, repents like the prodigal child and reconciles with her past by professing her love for her mother. At this point, the story moves to Africa, a pristine world untainted by modernity by the absence of electricity and use of candles. The mystical space in the story between the shadows of the protagonist and her mother is also symbolic. It reveals that a third factor has planted itself, albeit surreptitiously, between them. This third element is the new culture: an alien way of perceiving the self as distinct while family, cultural and historical ties are viewed as the *other*. The protagonist narrates:

We sat mesmerized because our shadows had made a space between themselves, as if they were making room for someone else. Nothing filled up the space between them, and the shadow of my mother sighed. The shadow of my mother danced around the room to a tune that my own shadow sang, and then they stopped. All along, our shadows had

grown thick and thin, long and short, had fallen at every angle, as if they were controlled by the light of day. Suddenly my mother got up and blew out the candles and our shadows vanished. (519)

The protagonist's decision to take her foreign song to Africa to convert her mother to the new culture is effective for just a while, but she fails because it is not strong enough to displace her foothold in the continent. This attempt at re-colonisation inevitably fails and the mother stamps it out by snuffing out the candle light that creates the shadows. The thickening and thinning of their shadows is also a sign that the foreign way is appealing but is unable to take strong roots in both mother and child. The protagonist's view of her African roots is a tragic reversal of perception, a distorted view of reality induced by a lost sense of direction often associated with psychological disorder. She then takes a good look at herself, a process of self-examination, to discover that she has become completely alienated from her mother. The changing shape of the third shadow standing between mother and child is indicative of the protagonist's changing perception of the new but alien culture. It is a clear sign of her condition of bondage and indecision.

The protagonist's deliberate effort to paint a glorious picture of the African plains (gold coloured) and her description of the medicinal oils obtainable from the continent reveal her love for a world that draws its sustenance from nature. Yet, she does not consider this world an ideal place for her because of the new ways she has imbibed. She attempts to corrupt it with new ideas to make it acceptable to her strange tastes but her mother develops scales of resistance against the intrusive foreign ways. This struggle transforms both mother and child into two animals that symbolize the natural tropical environment of Africa (the toad) and the dry westernised but unnatural environment of the industrialized West reminiscent of T.S. Elliot's Wasteland (the snake). As the protagonist (now a snake) assesses her condition while awaiting the opportunity to strike at her mother (now a toad), she finds herself at crossroads like the average Caribbean faced with the daunting task to choose between the African and European cultures. Reluctantly, she accepts the first.

Thus embracing her past, the protagonist draws sustenance from her mother and soon realizes she cannot progress without her support. As her African roots strengthen her and she feels invincible, she soon discovers that she cannot transcend her cultural past as long as she depends on it for survival. Though she feels that with time she will grow strong enough to break away from its ties, she realizes that her culture is not static; rather, it is also transforming to contain the various assaults against it, like the one she is waging against it. With such resistance, the mother grows stronger than the protagonist anticipates.

The description of Africa as the 'Garden of fruits' is an allusion to the Garden of Eden, to show that Africa is very fertile and rich enough in natural resources to sustain her children, including those in the Diaspora if they seek sustenance from it. The South-Westerly gate, through which the protagonist and her mother leave the garden, is also an allusion to the gate through which Adam and Eve exited the Garden of Eden after the fall. It represents the southern coastline of the African continent from where many of the slaves taken to the West Indies originated. The victims were taken away with the knowledge of their culture. It is that knowledge that is their mother that left with them to their 'new' world. The 'small a colony of worms' is indicative of decay that results when the enslaved exile alienates herself from her cultural roots.

The act of the protagonist yet again transforming herself into a lamb, an animal that often symbolizes innocence and purity, represents the state of the West Indians before the corruptive influences of Western culture tainted them. The cave in the story symbolizes a place of secret where relics of a people's past are kept. The protagonist treacherously takes residence there to learn the secrets of her culture in order to destroy it and break its hold on her so she can lose herself into the West. The episode is a clear indictment of exiles that are willing to destroy their African heritage to get accepted by their adopted cultures. Such acts of destruction range from denials of names and looting of cultural artefacts to destruction of records or associations that connect them to their African roots. Such actions are direct opposites of what Alex Haley attempts in *Roots*. The protagonist is so desperate to destroy her past that she builds a house over a deep hole in order to kill her mother. She fails despite her attempt to make the trap attractive by painting the house with yellow and green, symbols of life and fertility associated with Africa. She burns down the house in frustration. At this point, it finally dawns on her that whatever she desires to become, she must factor in her mother, the symbol of her African roots. Accepting this truth, she leaves Africa for good; not by the whips and ships of slave traders, but by choice. The condition of the West Indian in the present age is by their choice, not by European compulsion. This is the central message of the story.

In the final stage of the protagonist's psychological development, she finds herself ultimately trapped in the West. Though she strives to return to her roots, she is held back by forces beyond her control. To survive and prevent her imminent cultural death, she blends her African and Western ways to attain her final transformation. Her finding her mother in another form in her land of sojourn shows that her cultural roots go with her wherever she goes because it is in her blood. She transforms from a negroid to something that is neither fully African nor completely European. She develops 'pink feet' and straight hair to show the marriage of the African and the European in her personality. This symbolizes the blend of races and cultures that is the reality of the Caribbean society.

The mother in *Girl* is of a different mould. Unlike the one in the first story, who is more or less an ever present shadow persistently following her child and protecting her without directly intruding into her affairs; this one is determined to lash her child into line, if not with the whip, with the tongue to achieve her vision for her. Also, the protagonist of *Girl* is very passive in contrast to her no-nonsense mother. This reversal of roles in the characters in this second story is symbolic. The mother in *Girl* represents the foreign culture or colonizing country determined that her colony that is fast approaching its independence [the girl in the story is nearing adulthood] must be fully indoctrinated to know her place in the comity of nations. The girl is not permitted to think, let alone act, outside the commands of the mother who dictates to her how she must handle even the most private things in her life. The story symbolizes the desperation of the West to hold on tightly to its former colonies through direct control of their cultures, economy and politics. The Caribbean Islands constitute these colonies while European countries that control their economies are represented by the mother.

The beginning of the story sets out the relationship between mother and child. The mother is superior, all-knowing, authoritarian and uncompromising in her demands while her daughter is inferior, an object without a mind or will because of her of ignorance of the world in which she lives. The mother reels out orders peremptorily confident in the knowledge that her word is law:

Wash the white clothes on Monday and put them on the stone heap; wash the color clothes on Tuesday and put them on the clothesline to dry; don't walk barehead in the hot sun; cook pumpkin fritters in very hot sweet oil; soak your little cloths right after you take them off . . . soak salt fish overnight before you cook it; is it true that you sing benna in Sunday school?; always eat your food in such a way that it won't turn someone else's stomach; on Sundays try to like a lady (*Literature and its Writers* 275)

The droning voice of the mother continues unabated and makes it impossible for the girl to think because the mother's voice is all she hears all her life. All the chores the mother reels out clearly reveal that the girl is in a state of servitude, a condition the mother is determined to perpetuate. Though it is tempting to assume that many of the duties the mother dictates are normal in a typical Caribbean home, the tone she deploys completely displaces that line of thought. The mother addresses the child as if she were her domestic maid or servant. There is no sign of love or affection which a child naturally receives from the parents, just orders or commands. The girl does not voice her protestation; rather, she cries out her frustration in her mind. The admonitions she receives from the mother are sometimes derogatory and dehumanizing. For example, she warns the girl: “. . . on Sundays try to walk like a lady and not the slut you are so bent on becoming,” and “. . . this is how to behave in the presence of men who don't know you well, and this way they won't recognize immediately the slut I have warned you against becoming” (*Literature and its Writers* 275).

This outright abusiveness and conviction by the mother that her child is bent on leading a wayward existence is symbolic of the average Westerner's perception of the African as unstable, sexually loose and prone to mischief. It is a view that recalls the depiction of Africans in Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* (1939) and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899). The mother impresses on the girl the fact that she is not a boy, indirectly warning her that she must not be adventurous or experimental in anything she does. She must avoid undertaking any venture that is not part of the training of washing clothes, cooking, setting tables for others, behaving well before men and other domestic chores reserved for women. Men and boys, therefore, represent powerful countries of the west that colonised Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. Girls, on the other hand are the colonised who should never aspire to be like boys or take interest in whatever they do. The colonised must know their place by first acknowledging their natural limitations. The games of global politics, dominance, exploration and exploitation are for the boys while the roles of providing their labour demands and raw materials, supplying their domestic hands and servicing their sexual desires are duties for girls. The girl is groomed to recognize virile men (like Britain and the United States) and avoid weaklings (other nations that contend with the two for world dominance) and be wise enough to tell the difference by feeling their capacity to provide her needed aids. This is the situation reflected in *Girl*, a satiric depiction of the West's perception of the Caribbean and other postcolonial peoples.

Conclusion

Jamaica Kincaid's *My Mother* and *Girl* deploy symbolism to explore the dire conditions of exile and alienation of the Caribbean society, and their condition of dependency perpetuated by Western indoctrination respectively. The postcolonial dimension in the stories is the socio-cultural setting against which Caribbean characters are explored. The conclusion of *My Mother* suggests that the search for self-identity by the West Indian can

be achieved through cultural reintegration with Africa; because no society can thrive in a cultural limbo. Kincaid succeeds in the story through complex deployment of symbolism in exploring and revealing that the condition of alienation compounded by the state of exile of Caribbean people can be ameliorated through closer cultural ties politically, spiritually and psychologically with their African roots. On the other hand, *Girl* is a pointer to postcolonial nations who maintain a mother-daughter relationship with their former colonizers through military, economic and cultural pacts. It is a warning that they may never escape their condition of dependency as long as they continue to rely on foreign dictates or directives under the guise of globalisation.

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