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In Search of Annie Drew

JAMAICA KINCAID'S MOTHER AND MUSE

Daryl Cumber Dance

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INTRODUCTION *Filling In the Gaps*

What is left out is as important as what is there.

—Toni Morrison, “Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation”

What you see on the page is only part of the story.

—Olive Senior, “An Interview with Olive Senior”

She was a peasant girl born in Dominica who, when she was sixteen, ran away to Antigua, where she subsequently found herself a single mother. She finally married a carpenter and raised four children. She was a hardworking housewife and a devoted churchgoer. She made two trips to the United States to visit her daughter, her only travels outside her two tiny islands. This is not the stuff of which biographies/autobiographies/histories/literary studies are usually made. Such individuals never make the newspaper or the local evening television news unless they are the victims of some violent crime; no line is given to them in a magazine or a book; they are lost in the invisible masses who do not warrant close attention. They are like Roland in Jamaica Kincaid’s *The Autobiography of My Mother*: “He did not have a history; he was a small event in somebody else’s history” (167), “no history yet written had embraced him” (176); and like Mr. Potter: “the world did not pause when [he] was born, and the world did not ignore his birth, the world was only indifferent to it” (MP 61). And so it would seem to be with Annie Victoria Richardson Drew, who was, Kincaid writes after providing a few of the details of her life, “without interest in the world” (MP 138).

Despite the ordinariness of Annie Drew’s life, there is perhaps no other flesh-and-blood individual who has ever been so constantly and obsessively featured in the full canon of any writer as the mother of Jamaica Kincaid—not William Faulkner’s Civil War general grandfather, representing as he did the Old South, with which Faulkner was obsessed; nor Ernest Hemingway’s father, whose suicide was to forever haunt and perhaps finally destroy his son; nor Henry James’s adored cousin, whose early death is commemorated

over and over in his portraits of beautiful but doomed young heroines; nor James Baldwin's brutal stepfather, whose approval and acceptance the bastard child sought for a lifetime. None of these appears so persistently in those novelists' works as does Annie Victoria Richardson Drew (by some part of that name or some other name) in the works of Jamaica Kincaid. Indeed, one might argue that everything Kincaid has written is about her mother. Whether her subject is ostensibly herself (*At the Bottom of the River*, *Annie John*, and *See Now Then*), her father (*Mr. Potter*, his actual name), her brother (*My Brother*, the most directly autobiographical and the least fictionalized of her works), her employers (*Lucy*), her home nation (*A Small Place*), a precolonial world (*Annie*, *Gwen*, *Lily*, *Pam and Tulip*), or her gardening (*My Garden (Book)*): and *Among Flowers: A Walk in the Himalaya*), the real subject is her mother. And whatever her plot seems to be—a brother's death from AIDS, a father's desertion, a young girl's maturity, her shattered marriage—the real issue underlying everything appears to be Kincaid's efforts to free herself from her mother. The mother is indeed, as Kincaid writes in *Mr. Potter*, "the central figure in my life" (153). This mother may go by slightly different names, and a few details in her life may vary from story to story, but in fact Kincaid aficionados immediately recognize her in story after story. She is unforgettable. Kincaid seems preoccupied by, even obsessed with, a series of events involving Annie Drew or involving Annie Drew and herself, and she reworks them over and over throughout her oeuvre.

Oddly enough, given the prominence that the mother has in Kincaid's works, she is never the admitted focus, not even in that oddly and contradictorily titled *The Autobiography of My Mother*, where Xuela Claudette Richardson, the figure who might arguably be said to be her mother and who bears her mother's surname, is less like the actual mother than most of the mother figures in the rest of Kincaid's canon. Though Kincaid directly told Robert Birnbaum that she attempted in *The Autobiography of My Mother* to write an autobiography of her mother (173), it is apparent that Xuela is often more like Jamaica than like Annie. Kincaid, who lamented, "I am my mother" (*Dance/Kin*), leads us to see Xuela as a combination of mother and daughter when she ends her story: "This account of my life has been an account of my mother's life as much as it has been an account of mine, and even so, again it is an account of the life of the children I did not have" (227). The fact that in this novel, as is so often the case, the daughter and mother are indeed one helps to explain the oft-noted incongruity of the title, for the "autobiography" of her mother seems truly her own autobiography.

Since Kincaid has never written a novel or a memoir or a biography tellingly titled *My Mother*,¹ I project here reflections of her mother that grow out of Kincaid's writings, my own exploration of the life of Annie Drew, and even my speculations on the inner workings of her mind and emotions—speculations arising from my own experience as a woman, wife, mother, and daughter and from my empathetic association with her in certain instances. While these reflections seek to evoke the flesh-and-blood woman who was the loving mother of the renowned author, they also find much of their substance in the hated “character”/“monster”/“demon”/“jablesse” (AT 8–12)/“god” (Goldfarb 95; Kincaid, “The Estrangement” 40)/“god Cronus” (Haber)/“Mrs. Judas” (*Lucy* 130)/“serpent” (AJ 52)/“crocodile” (AJ 84), “ball of fury” (*Lucy* 150), and “hypocrite” (AJ 133) passionately and bitterly sketched in minute detail in myriad accounts in the Kincaid canon. Thus, instead of focusing on any one work, I read Kincaid's works intertextually. I take my cue and find my justification for this reading in two other of my favorite writers, Toni Morrison and Olive Senior, as well as in some “cues” from Kincaid herself.

Nobel laureate Toni Morrison frequently talks about the reader's obligation to fill in the gaps in the novels she writes. In “Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation,” she discusses her goal “to have the reader work *with* the author in the construction of the book,” adding that “What is left out is as important as what is there” (341). A characteristic of Black literature, like other Black art forms, is that it seeks to elicit and incorporate audience response, and Morrison strives to have her works, like the Black sermon, move the reader to “join . . . in the sermon, . . . to stand up and to weep and to cry and to accede or to *change and to modify—to expand on the sermon*” (341; emphasis mine). She seeks what she calls, in *Playing in the Dark*, “response-ability,” noting that “readers and writers both struggle to interpret and perform within a common language shareable imaginative worlds. And although upon that struggle the positioning of the reader has justifiable claims, the author's presence—her or his intentions, blindness, and sight—is part of the imaginative activity” (xii). Morrison's goals as a writer, detailed in “Rootedness,” are remarkably similar to Kincaid's: to pass on the historical and archetypal stories (folklore, oral literature); to tell an individual story (autobiography) that is also a group story (history); to reflect the culture out of which she writes; to retain the presence of the ancestors (“timeless people whose relationships to the characters are benevolent, instructive, and protective” [343]); and to include in the book “discredited knowledge,” that is, “[other] ways of knowing things,” “superstition and magic” (342).² (Though I provide

generic designations parenthetically here, it should be noted that Morrison and Kincaid, as well as several other Diasporic writers, often deny the validity of these generic distinctions.)

Thus I assume what Morrison calls the reader's "response-ability" to assess Kincaid's "blindness, and sight," to fill in the gaps and make the changes and modifications that seem necessary in a reading of Kincaid's mother. I trust that after my argument the reader may acknowledge, in the words of Antonia S. Byatt in a different context, "that we *shall know* the writing differently or better or satisfactorily." "In these readings," Byatt continues, "a sense that the text has appeared to be wholly new, never before seen, is followed, almost immediately, by the sense that it was *always there*, that we, the readers, knew it was always there, and have *always known* it was as it was, though we have now for the first time recognised, become fully cognisant of, our knowledge" (*Possession*, qtd. in Morrison, *Playing in the Dark* xi-xii).

I find further support for my reading of Kincaid in comments by the noted Jamaican short-story writer Olive Senior regarding her own oeuvre: "What you see on the page is only part of the story. The inexplicable, the part not expressed, the part withheld is the part that you the reader will have to supply from your emotional and imaginative stock. . . . I believe it's my job as writer not to say it all, for I am only one-half of the equation—reader-writer—and that the work becomes complete only when it is read, when the reader enters the world I have created. I therefore tend to leave a lot of my work open-ended" (Rowell 483).

Kincaid voices a similar sentiment in her interview with Susan Walker when she talks about the horrors unleashed by Europeans: "All of these things I knew when I wrote (Mr. Potter [sic]), but I would never put them in a book. It interests me to have a reader discover them, not to tell them" (EO4; emphasis mine). Such cues exist throughout Kincaid's works, and I highlight them as entrées to the readings I offer of her canon. Throughout are some of the details that I believe beg to be discovered, filled in, and corrected—and I shall do it! I shall, in other words, try to do for Annie Drew what Toni Morrison does for the similarly silenced and vilified African Americans in her study of early Anglo-American fiction, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*—tell the half that has never been told, that has indeed often been intentionally unseen, ignored, concealed, repressed, distorted, and misrepresented.

I therefore propose in this study of Annie Drew to enter not only the actual worlds of Antigua and Dominica but also Kincaid's literary world, bringing

to the latter, in the words of Senior, my “emotional and imaginative stock” in order to “complete” Kincaid’s canon. I do this keeping in mind that her work begins with her mother’s stories, which Kincaid often reminds us are probably colored by her mother’s imagination. I would add that they are perhaps also colored by the mother’s motivation in sharing a particular story with her child—to instruct, discipline, govern, and/or coerce. Kincaid does not make much of this usual motivation for the stories our ancestors tell us, but we know that folklore is often designed to teach. Kincaid brings to bear her own imagination and needs and motives as she refashions those stories. In *My Brother*, she notes that even when she was a child, when her mother would omit details in her account of something, “I filled them in” (75). Jamaica Kincaid always had a remarkable memory. It is surely the author herself speaking when she has Xuela declare, “I always looked back” (*Auto* 139).

Her mother was once proud of Jamaica’s ability to fill in details she might have missed as she recounted an event. As Jamaica got older, however, her mother hated this because her daughter would remind her of things she preferred to forget. Kincaid clearly remembers the moment her mother harshly reprimanded her for remembering too much: “You mine [sic] long, you know” (*MB* 75). (It’s very likely that Annie Drew did not consider that rather mild “You mine long, you know” to be the vicious repudiation that her daughter imagined it.) Kincaid told Brad Goldfarb that she is enraged when she hears her mother’s accounts of things: “Her telling of it is always so different from how I remember it” (98). She explains that her mother “plays with memory”—she’s not so much telling a lie as remembering “something quite the way it did not happen” (Goldfarb 98). Their varying “memories” reinforce Paul Eakin’s definition of memories as “perceptions newly occurring in the present rather than images fixed and stored and in the past and somehow mysteriously recalled to present consciousness” (Rice 26).³

The accounts of Kincaid or the Kincaid persona are often not just her current perception of a past event, but a conscious revision of those past events, a revision designed to achieve her own personal goals. Thus even as a school-girl writing an essay to be read in class about an event that occurred when her mother took her swimming, the Kincaid persona Annie John provides a fictional ending, noting: “I didn’t exactly tell a lie about the last part. That is just what would have happened in the old days. . . . I couldn’t bear to have anyone see how deep in disfavor I was with my mother” (*AJ* 45), clearly establishing a pattern we see in many of Kincaid’s works wherein she manipulates events apparently because of some concern about her own image. She

writes all of her brothers out of the otherwise autobiographical story of her childhood in *Annie John* and allows her employer Mariah to believe the Kincaid persona Lucy was an only child in the autobiographical *Lucy*. Always the reader must seek to uncover the revisions, interpret their significance, and determine the actual truth. As Kincaid has said, although her work is autobiographical, "it wouldn't hold up in a court of law" (qtd. in Simmons, *Jamaica Kincaid* 5). Elsewhere she has explained: "You can't trust [memory]. For one thing, the thing that is happening to you might be so unpleasant, you may need to subtract from it or add to it so that in the retelling, you can manage it" (Headlee).

While there are admittedly changes from the actual events in the Kincaid plots, many of them filtered through her mother's experience and imagination and some of them revised to serve the author's purposes, there is no doubt that Kincaid is committed to writing autobiography: she has insisted that there is no reason for her to be a writer without autobiography (for similar assertions about the autobiographical nature of her writing, see Ferguson, "A Lot of Memory" 176; Cudjoe 227; Gilmore, "Endless Autobiography" 213; Vorda, "An Interview" 16; and Muirhead 45). When asked how much of her work is autobiographical, her stock response is, "All of it, even the punctuation" (Gilmore, "Endless Autobiography" 213). She told Hannah Levintova, "Everything I write is autobiographical." Kincaid informed Donna Perry that she didn't know how to write a story about something that hadn't happened to her (495). When Brad Goldfarb asked about the people she wrote about, she replied, "Well, I've only ever written about my family" (99). In the interview with Emily Listfield, she insisted that she had never written about anyone except her mother and herself (82). She has frequently reaffirmed that the basic plot in several of her works comes from her own experience: she said that nearly all of *Annie John* comes directly from her own life (Cryer B4); and of *Lucy*, she declared, "I really was an *au pair*, . . . I was writing about my own experience" (Perry 506-7). Jane King has maintained that "it is impossible not to feel that in reading about Annie or Lucy we are reading about Jamaica, or rather the formation of Jamaica; more correctly, that we are reading about Elaine [Kincaid's given name]" (887). Thus whether the central character is called Mignonette in "Antigua Crossings"; Annie in *Annie John*; Lucy in *Lucy*; Xuela in *The Autobiography of My Mother*; Jamaica in *A Small Place, My Brother, Mr. Potter, My Garden (Book)*; and *Among Flowers*; Jamaica Sweet in *See Now Then*;⁴ or is unnamed as she is in the stories in *At the Bottom of the River* and "the Biography of a Dress," the protagonist inevitably represents familiar

aspects of the character and conflicts of Jamaica Kincaid or a blending of Kincaid and her mother. Thus to avoid confusion in this study, I sometimes refer to the protagonist/narrator in the fiction simply as the “Kincaid character” or “Jamaica character.”

Kincaid’s body of autobiographical literature, some presented as fiction, some as memoir, some as autobiography, some as essay, has been characterized by Leigh Gilmore as serial autobiography: “It is not that Kincaid is writing the same book over and over; rather, she is adding volumes to a series” (“Endless Autobiography” 214). Jana Evans Braziel has also commented on what she calls Kincaid’s “autobiographical ambivalence” (7): “Autobiography, for Kincaid, is entangled with myth and history; and this aesthetic knot imbues all of Kincaid’s writings, particularly her philosophical engagements with genre” (6). Ultimately, she concludes, what Kincaid is writing is “alterbiography,” “texts . . . not essentially about an individual life, or even a group of individual lives, but rather—more abstractly, but with material ramifications—about the national-textual problematic of identity in diaspora” (8).

Kincaid makes it clear that she gave little time to research in writing *Mr. Potter*, the biography of her father: “No, no research, . . . I don’t believe in that. Then I would have to actually write one of those conventional things” (Jones D1); “Always I’m writing about these actual people in my past. I don’t write about them to know them in any biographical way. I like to think of them in some sort of existential way” (Walker). In *My Brother*, as she explains some of the things she told the people among whom she was living in the United States about her mother, she declares that what she told them was a combination of fact and fiction, but she insisted that both the parts she made up as well as the actual facts were true (119). She told Moira Ferguson that the events in her work are “true to me. They may not be true to other people” (“A Lot” 176). Kincaid probably was following the precept of the sage who said, “Never let what really happened get in the way of the truth.”⁵ Kincaid’s truth is thus a complex blending of facts, fiction, memories, ego, goal, imagination, and artistic construction. Like Derek Walcott, Wilson Harris, and several other African Diasporic writers, Kincaid refuses to acknowledge the purity of genre, to accept the absolute separation of history, biography, autobiography, memoir, mythology, folktale.⁶ Kincaid fudges those lines throughout her work and ends up to some degree reinforcing Walcott’s insistence that autobiography is a form of fiction, and “I myself am a fiction” (qtd. in Baugh 50). Of Kincaid, Walcott told Leslie Garis: “As she writes a sentence, the temperature of it psychologically is that it heads toward its own contradictions.

... Her work is so full of spiritual contradictions clarified that it's extremely profound and courageous" (Garis 80).⁷

All of these contradictions often lead to recurrent portrayals of her mother in stories usually motivated by her mother. In fact, she told Kay Bonetti: "If I had had another kind of life I would not have been moved to write" (133)—thus for good or for bad, she would not have been a writer except for her mother. And writing, she has often said, has been her salvation: by writing about her own life, she saved her life; by writing about her dying brother, she avoided perishing with him (cover of *MB*). And in *The Autobiography of My Mother*, Xuela declares that she probably saved her life by writing letters (22).

Marie-Hélène Laforest emphasizes what every Kincaid scholar acknowledges: "Her mother's body is . . . preserved in her daughter's words" (26). However, Kincaid's acknowledged difficulties in her trip to the Himalayas might be used to explain her problems with portraying her mother: "Not ever did I become accustomed to the vast difference between my expectation, my perception, and reality; the way things really are" (AF 143).

The goal of this study is to provide at least one mirror that provides a fuller, fairer, and more evenhanded reflection of this mother, one not restricted to the daughter's expectations and perceptions, one that might even reveal, not just Jamaica's mother, but Annie Victoria Richardson Drew. I try to complete Kincaid's portrait of her mother, not by fantasizing some created events but by filling in some of the blanks Kincaid leaves and perhaps correcting some of the misrepresentations she makes. In doing this I am presumptuous enough to hope to allay her lament, "I don't know her really" (Cook 20), and to help her (as well as Kincaid aficionados and even casual readers) to know the mother she leaves in the shadows (Morrison would say in the dark) and seems fearful to fully portray, perhaps unable to move beyond some of the traumatic events in their relationship. I recognize more than ever after working on this biography that Kincaid was quite right when, reflecting on the man who was the previous owner of her house in Vermont, she declared that "no one can ever be really known" (MG 48). I recognize more than ever as well that to write about Annie Drew is inevitably to write about Jamaica Kincaid. Like the author who often agonizingly recognizes that she can never separate herself from her mother ("I am my mother" [Kin/Dance]; "I was not like my mother—I was my mother" [Lucy 90]), I learned during this study that to unearth Annie, I had to write about, with, and through her alter ego. To paraphrase Xuela, the Kincaid character in *The Autobiography of My*

Mother, this telling of Annie Drew's life is as much an account of her daughter's life as it is of Annie Drew's.

Nevertheless, I hope, too, to provide some balance by giving some indications of the views of the flesh-and-blood Annie Drew, to achieve that balance that Kincaid insists should obtain in an honorable world in which each person "must be considered with the utmost seriousness, the same seriousness with which we consider our own lives" (MG 47). I hope to realize something of what is achieved by Rosellen Brown in her *Autobiography of My Mother*, an interesting parallel not so much to Kincaid's work of the same name but to Kincaid's whole canon. Brown, too, pictures a mother and daughter with serious conflicts and differences and inabilities to understand and communicate with each other; the key difference, however, is that Brown relates her story from both points of view, alternating between the mother (Gerda) and daughter (Renada).⁸

I hope that this study of Annie Drew will not be perceived as an attack upon Kincaid's works, each of which I, a shameless Kincaid devotee, regard as a magnificently achieved masterpiece, and each of which I acknowledge represents Kincaid's own truth.

In the interest of full disclosure, I must admit, too, to having an intensely emotional response to Kincaid's work. Her conflicts with her mother are something about which I know a great deal. While I won't attempt another biography/autobiography/memoir/confessional here, I must note that I, like Kincaid, experienced an occasionally tumultuous relationship with a mother who on one level made every sacrifice and provided every opportunity for me at the same time that she resented me for the choices I made and the independence I asserted; who at one and the same time took great pride in and expressed great jealousy of my successes. However, our battles were minor compared to those of Kincaid and her mother: Our moments of not speaking were infrequent and short; our separations were rare and short-lived; our communication was better; we forgave (though I'm not sure either of us ever apologized enough to please the other); we enjoyed many happy times together throughout her life; and each of us always knew the other had her back when either one of us was sick, in need, or under attack by someone—*anyone*—else. I am vain enough to believe that I understand my conflicts with my mother better than Kincaid understands hers and that I have more empathy for my mother's behavior and motivations. I am vain enough to believe that Kincaid may need me to "ente[r] the world she created" and provide "the

inexplicable, the part not expressed" that will give fullness to the portrait of Annie Victoria Richardson Drew. And in doing this, I hope to help Kincaid achieve the victory that she never experienced in her battle with her mother. My presumptuousness here is to some degree prompted by Kincaid's expressed hope that whenever she writes something it will change her, make her into something not herself. The change never happens, she has said, but she keeps attempting it (Alleyne).

The last word that Kincaid presumes to offer as writer with the power of words is never the last word when those words deal with a superhuman mother who still, even from the grave, dictates everything she writes.

I was particularly pleased that, as I began this study, Kincaid herself was very enthusiastic about it, declaring the project a fascinating idea and expressing delight that her mother was of interest to scholars. Kincaid enthusiastically shared with me pictures of the family, of her grandparents, her Aunt Mary's baptism, her Aunt Mary's wedding, of her brothers, all of which she promised to scan and send to me, pictures that she said she just took from her mother. Unfortunately, as this study neared completion, Kincaid decided that I was taking possession of something that was, in fact, hers (e-mail, March 30, 2009). She never sent the pictures.

There has certainly been a substantial body of work treating Jamaica Kincaid's issues with her mother. Scores of postcolonial critics have provided important studies allegorizing the mother as representative of the colonial motherland (see Paravisini-Gebert 27; Ferguson, "A Lot" 1; de Abruna 173; and Jackson 310). Ramon E. Soto-Crespo, in "Death and the Diaspora Writer: Hybridity and Mourning in the Work of Jamaica Kincaid," views the spreading of AIDS through Devon's body as analogous with the spread of colonialism through the West Indies. Others have effectively provided psychoanalytical interpretations: Bryant Mangum, in one of the earliest critical essays on Kincaid, "Jamaica Kincaid," presents a Freudian analysis of *At the Bottom of the River* and the stories that would soon appear in *Annie John*; J. Brooks Bouson, in *Jamaica Kincaid: Writing Memory, Writing Back to the Mother*, "read[s] her works through the lens of contemporary shame and trauma theory" (5); while H. Adlai Murdoch, in "Severing the (M)other Connection," defines Annie John's quest for identity as "mediated primarily by the Lacanian paradigm of the alienated subject" (325), and sees a "possible efficacy" of reading the narrative "through the prism of . . . the Freudian oedipal paradigm" (327). Giselle Liza Anatol, in "Speaking in (M)other Tongues," provides a linguistic reading, focusing on the "mother tongue." Louise Bernard's "Countermem-

ory and Return: Reclamation of the (Postmodern) Self in Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother* and *My Brother*" provides one of a number of postmodernist readings. Giovanni Covi combines feminist, postmodern, and postcolonial approaches in her *Jamaica Kincaid's Prismatic Subjects*. Several others, too numerous to mention, have offered important feminist or womanist readings.

Earlier in her career, when Kincaid was confronted with such postcolonial, psychoanalytical, feminist, modernist, postmodernist, and even Africanist readings of her works, she rejected membership in any kind of school, declaring that she doesn't want to be considered a feminist and cannot bear to be in any kind of category or group or school (Cudjoe 221). She even rejected Cudjoe's characterizing of her mother's stories as folklore, insisting that she wouldn't call it folklore; she would simply describe it as her mother's "experience with life" (231). As time passed, however, Kincaid tended to point to some of the postcolonial implications of the mother figure. When Gerhard Dilger asked about her relationship with her mother in 1992, she said that earlier in her career, she could have discussed the immediate mother and daughter, but that now she is writing about the mother country, the powerful and the weak, something much broader (23). In a 1994 interview, she similarly declared: "I used to think I was writing about my mother and myself. Later I began to see that I was writing about the relationship between the powerful and the powerless. . . . And then it became clear to me . . . that the mother I was writing about was really Mother Country" (Ferguson, "A Lot of Memory" 177).

Kincaid parodies Freudian interpretations in *Lucy*: when the Jamaica character tells her employers, Lewis and Mariah, her dream, Mariah said, "Dr. Freud for a Visitor," confusing Lucy, who did not know who Freud was. Lucy is upset by their laughter because she had shared her dreams with them, something she did only with people who were important to her (15). Clearly the theory prevented them from understanding Lucy and her realities, something like the problem that the novelist Buchi Emecheta experienced: "I chronicle the little happenings in the lives of the African women that I know. I did not know that by doing so I was going to be called a feminist" (175). Giovanna Covi concisely reinforces Kincaid's position regarding theoretical interpretations of her work: "She constantly warns us against grounding her discourse upon any presumed external foundation . . . [and] makes clear that Western culture is not adequate to understand her" (91).

Many other African and African Diasporic writers also seek to distinguish

and distance themselves from the old prescribed Western male-dominated theories that have not reflected *them*, their lives, and their works, often viewing Western criticism as another imperialist project. Audre Lorde warned in her memorable speech at the Second Sex Conference in New York on September 29, 1979: "*The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*" (112, emphasis in original). Barbara Christian, in her 1987 "The Race for Theory," argued that the popular linguistic jargon of Western critics was designed to silence Black women writers. Opal Palmer Adisa has accused that these "theories, . . . rather than illuminating the works under exploration, obfuscate and problematize these works so that students are rendered speechless, [one telling me,] 'I can't talk that talk, so I end up not saying anything'" (103). Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* is motivated by her interest "in how agendas in criticism have disguised themselves and, in so doing, impoverished the literature it studies"; she continues, "It is important to see how inextricable Africanism is or ought to be from the deliberations of literary criticism and the wanton, elaborate strategies undertaken to erase its presence from view" (8-9).⁹

That the Kincaid character is similarly silenced by theory when she is concerned about her individual relationship with her mother is aptly illustrated in Lucy's discussion with her employer, Mariah, who is pained by Lucy's difficult relationship with her mother: "Mariah wanted to rescue me. She spoke of women in society, women in history, women in culture, women everywhere. But I couldn't speak, so I couldn't tell her that my mother was my mother and that society and history and culture and other women in general were something else altogether" (*Lucy* 131-32).

Mariah nonetheless goes out and comes back with a large book on women, which she opens to the first chapter and hands to the Kincaid character, who painfully realizes that Mariah cannot understand her dilemma, which was "more simple and more complicated" than these theoretical explanations: she was mourning "the end of a love affair, perhaps the only true love in my whole life I would ever know" (*Lucy* 132).

In a similar way, when Mariah tries to console her on the death of her father by saying that nobody thinks about the fact that their parents will die, Lucy is once again annoyed at her for talking about "everybody" when she (*Lucy*) was talking only about herself (139).

This study does not repeat the important allegorical readings of Annie Drew; it is not about "everybody"; it is not about "other women in general";

it is not about “women everywhere.” It is about the flesh-and-blood individual who was Jamaica’s mother (“my mother was my mother”)—or at least as much about her as I can glean from my sources, from Kincaid’s writings, and from my own experiences as a woman/mother/daughter, inspired by the spirit of this fascinating mother who has been inhabiting my being since 2007.