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Melanie Clore

A FOLLOWING SEA:
CHARTING SEA IMAGERY AND IDENTITY IN JAMAICA KINCAID'S *ANNIE JOHN* AND PAULE MARSHALL'S *PRAISESONG FOR THE WIDOW*

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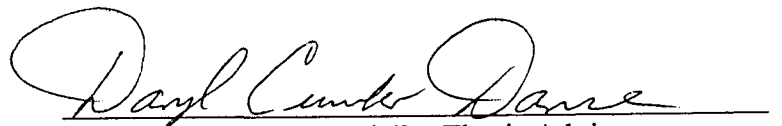
In Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* and Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*, the sea incites a vital discourse on western influence, diasporic identity, and self-discovery. Both female protagonists, Annie John and Avey Johnson, purge their old identities and learn to embrace their cultural origins through the guidance, care, and persuasion of ancestral figures. The sea is not only a purifying agent, but also a catalyst for change as both women struggle to manage their multiple cultural influences, and achieve a unified, stable, independent self. The sea is also charged with socio-political controversy as colonization and tourism intrude upon the Caribbean and its people; the sea becomes a commodity to be bought, consumed, and exploited. In both novels the sea acts as a dynamic medium by which complex binaries are expressed and is the guiding force behind personal transformation and rebirth.

I certify that I have read this thesis and find that, in scope and quality, it satisfies the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



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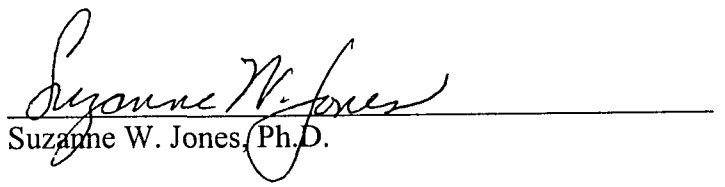

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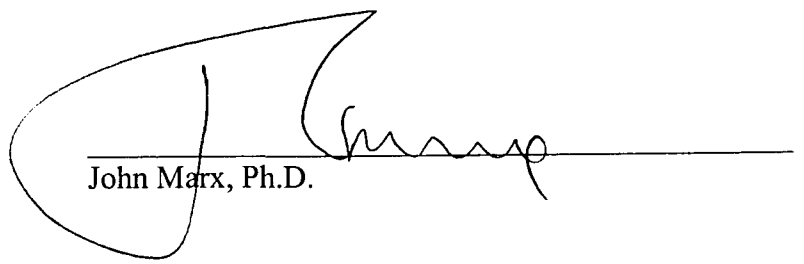

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But today I recapture the islands'
bright beaches: blue mist from the ocean
rolling into the fishermen's houses.
By these shores I was born: sound of the sea
came in at my window, life heaved and breathed in me then
with the strength of that turbulent soil.

"South," The Arrivants
Edward [Kamau] Brathwaite

Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?
Where is your tribal memory? Sirs, in that gray vault. The sea. The sea
Has locked them up. The sea is History.

"The Sea Is History," Star Apple Kingdom
Derek Walcott

The sea takes on its own persona in Caribbean Literature. It is a powerful source of life and an integral part of identity. The sea is charged with socio-political issues and debates, and functions as a metaphor for one's journey to a complete personal and cultural identity. In addition, it often incites a political commentary addressing the nature and effects of colonization. "The Sea Is History": it is a history of Africans suffering their sea voyage to endure the brutality of slavery, a history of those same people being colonized and oppressed, and finally, a history of their multi-cultural quest for a stable and independent self. In Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* and Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow* an undulating sea propels their protagonists forward, illustrating their struggle for cultural and national identity. Furthermore, a following sea acts as the guiding force behind personal transformation and rebirth. [1]

[1] "A Following Sea" is a sailing term in which a boat is propelled toward its destination with the wind and waves behind it. It can be a difficult point of sail as the sailor strives to keep the boat balanced and stable amidst unpredictable wind shifts and swells.

Annie John and *Praisesong for the Widow* complement each other as sea imagery illuminates similar journeys of identity in the lives of two very different women. In one, a poor Antiguan girl grows into adulthood, the consummation of a series of transformations among many in her young life; in the other a wealthy, proper, sixty-four year old, American woman with a lifetime of changes and adjustments to reflect upon, has yet to discover the answer to an ancestral figure's question, "And what you is? [. . .] What's your nation?" (*Praisesong* 166-67). Audre Lorde speaks of difference as a "fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic" (99). The polarities and intersections between these two women and their cultural backgrounds generate a vital discourse on the African diaspora and the search for and reconciliation of a complete identity. Sea imagery is the means by which both novelists express the complexities inherent in the quest for self-discovery.

The sea, for Marshall's protagonist, Avey, is the catalyst for transformation, as a cruise through the Caribbean brings dreams of forgotten childhood roots to the forefront. She leaves the ship and unexpectedly undergoes a rebirth and reconnection to her African-American identity. The sea is the purifying agent here as a tumultuous sail from Grenada to the small island of Carriacou causes her to purge her grief, materialism, and regret, leaving a fundamental self that is open to her past and her national identity.

In Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*, the young Antiguan protagonist grows up being "ever in her [mother's] wake" (17). Annie expresses her relationship with her mother by describing their activities hour by hour; and when her mother kisses her toward the end of the day, Annie concludes, "It was in such a paradise that I lived" (25). Water imagery is

first introduced when her mother protects her from ill-spirited people, bad fortune, and physical ailments by ritually bathing her in fresh and later seawater. Annie falls from her Edenic existence as she comes of age, and faces the inevitable separation from her mother and the struggle toward individuality. Furthermore, the recurrent sea images unify the individual stories, which strengthen Kincaid's major themes.[2] Sea imagery conveys Annie's search for identity during the confusion, fear, and transformation normally associated with one's adolescence.

British colonialism also plays a major role in Annie's development, and Kincaid illustrates colonial influence literally, in Annie's British education, for example, and metaphorically in the mother-daughter relationship, which can be interpreted as mirroring the one between England and Antigua. Kincaid's pervasive use of sea and water imagery provides significant insight into Annie John's search for her personal identity and her national one in which British and Caribbean cultures vie for a place. The intersection of multiple cultures is not isolated to lifelong residents of post-colonial countries either. Marshall's protagonist also struggles with the meeting of her African heritage and the western culture in which she grew up.

The multi-cultural individual is faced with difficult binaries that must be sorted out and understood before a unified self can be achieved. These binaries have been described by post-colonial theorists as the "relationship between the imported European and the local, between ancestry and destiny, and between language and place" (Ashcroft,

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[2] Because each chapter appeared in separate issues of the *New Yorker* as independent pieces before being bound into a novel, some critics argue its place in the novel genre; however, themes associated with the sea and identity firmly establish the text's unity.

Griffiths, Tiffin 145). Annie and Avey wrestle with these juxtapositions as they both grow up in westernized society and must understand its impact while preserving their own African-Caribbean/African-American culture, which is instilled in them by ancestral figures who aid and inspire their transformation. In *The Empire Writes Back,* George Lamming and Edward Kamau Brathwaite are referenced as reflecting in their works the necessity to "revive that lost ancestral link before the Caribbean present can be understood" (147). While embracing the past, however, the colonized person cannot neglect or erase the impact of the colonizer regardless of whether or not national independence has been attained; the meeting of two cultures must somehow be negotiated. J. Michael Dash proposes multiple cultures can manifest into a "creative syncretism" in which one's collective past and multi-cultural identity is embraced and then reflected in the public sphere (150). Jamaica Kincaid and Paule Marshall are fine examples of colonized women who express their multi-cultural identities in the public sphere through their fiction. As a result, the characters they create journey through the difficult questions of cultural and national identity inevitable in a diasporic existence.

Just as the multi-cultural individual works to understand the past in order to move into the future, the lens can zoom out to a broader yet similar analysis of the multi-cultural country's endeavor toward an inner unity that reconciles disparate cultures that have formed in the wake of colonial domination. Among the myriad of issues that arise during "decolonization," the impact of tourism on the Caribbean emerges as a prevalent theme. Frantz Fanon contends that the decolonized countries are not successful in their transition to independence, in part, because "the national bourgeoisie steps into the shoes

of the former European settlement" thereby functioning as "intermediaries" to the overthrown government (*Wretched of the Earth* 153). It is then the middle class that gives birth to tourism (or at least encourages and supports it) in which westerners flock to the Caribbean and the islanders become financially dependent on the money that cruise ships and mammoth resorts generate. Fanon criticizes the local middle class along with their western counterparts for turning the Caribbean into the "brothel of Europe" (154). Kincaid and Marshall decry the extravagance and travesty of tourism and explore the impact it has on the individual. Kincaid writes from the lower-class, colonized, perspective in *Annie John*, while Marshall provides the opposite view as her protagonist is an American tourist who steams into the Caribbean aboard a western-operated cruise ship.

By placing Avey and her two African-American friends on a predominately white cruise ship, Marshall offers a commentary on the African-American as other. The three women follow an assimilationist pattern Langston Hughes observes amongst African-Americans in which they "pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization," and therefore stand at the bottom of what he calls the, "Racial Mountain" (301). He attributes an African-American's "desire to run away spiritually from his race" to a family structure in which white values and attitudes are instilled in the child from sources such as education and the media. This idea is echoed in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* as he discusses the history the Antillean child learns as well as the more pop-culture objects they consume (such as comic books) to support his claim that there are "close connections between the structure of the family and the structure of

the nation" (141). Both Annie and Avey are schooled in Western education systems and are exposed to stories and histories that depict the black or Indian character as inferior and, according to Fanon, as "the Wolf, the Devil, the Evil Spirit, the Bad Man, the Savage" (146). In George Lamming's *Pleasures of Exile,* he uses Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to mirror the relationship between Prospero and Caliban—colonizer and colonized. Caliban is perceived as a savage after he has been "colonized by language, and excluded by language [. . .] exiled from his gods, exiled from his nature, exiled from his own name!" (15). The protagonists in *Annie John* and *Praisesong for the Widow* search for a way to navigate through the oppression and alienation Lamming has laid out here (whether it is a part of their cultural past or present) by understanding and embracing their multi-cultural identity.

Though colonial and post-colonial themes surface and are important in achieving a complete interpretation of the texts, Kincaid's and Marshall's use of sea imagery is more often used to describe the actual process of transformation. The most compelling instance of sea imagery in *Annie John* occurs very early in the text. Annie is reading aloud a school assignment to her class in which she relates a particular visit to the sea with her mother. Here Annie states that "a bath in the sea had been recommended as a strengthening remedy, [and] since this bathing in the sea was a medicine and not a picnic, we had to bathe without wearing swimming costumes" (42). Here, Kincaid proposes that the sea is a place to go if one is weak, and its medicinal quality suggests that cures for ailments can be found there. They must strip their "costumes" (i.e., their social and

material selves) in order to experience the sea in their most pure and natural state. Annie's identity is still inextricably connected to her Mother, of whom she writes:

> My mother was a superior swimmer. When she plunged into the seawater, it was as if she had always lived there. She would go far out if it was safe to do so, and she could tell just by looking at the way the waves beat if it was safe to do so. She could tell if a shark was nearby, and she had never been stung by a jellyfish. (42)

Her mother's identity is well established as Annie observes, "it was as if she had always lived there"; furthermore, she knows herself and the sea well enough to discern dangers, as she can "tell just by looking at the way the waves beat" whether it is safe to proceed in any given situation. Apparently, her keen sense of self protects her from vicious attacks or even miniscule "stings" from her community. Perhaps the potentially hurtful sea creatures symbolize the angry women who have slept with Annie's father, and from whom her mother has previously protected her with medicinal baths. Her mother exudes a high level of comfort, security, and confidence. Annie feeds off these strong qualities, but this particular day at the sea she experiences the panic and anxiety of being stripped of these attributes.

Annie has not yet developed the intuition and complete self-image she admires in her mother; in fact, she shows an intense apprehension about exploring her identity. This is the first of several instances in which becoming an individual induces a paralysis or helplessness of being. Annie contrasts her mother's relationship to the sea with her own as she tells her audience of school children that she cannot swim. She admits, "In fact, if

I was in water up to my knees I was sure that I was drowning." Even the smallest venture into the sea makes Annie feel as if she is gasping for air and is doomed to "drown." Her mother tries a variety of tactics to acclimate Annie to the water, from the "coaxing method to just throwing [her] in without a word. Nothing worked" (42). What she tells us next, however, explains why her mother's teaching strategies failed:

> The only way I could go into the water was if I was on my mother's back, my arms clasped tightly around her neck, and she would then swim around not too far from the shore. It was only then that I could forget how big the sea was, how far down the bottom could be, and how filled up it was with things that couldn't understand a nice hallo. (42)

Her mother's swimming lessons fail because the two had not mentally separated from one another. In other words, Annie resisted the vastness and depth of self-discovery because she believed her mother would "save" her. The daughter knew she could simply be supported by her mother's identity, and breathe freely while gliding on the surface of the expansive unknown that she fears. The unification of the two identities allows the protagonist to forgo her own self-exploration. Annie's psychological attachment to her mother is a symptom of their physical closeness marked by their inseparable daily lives that is methodically described in the beginning of the novel.

The psychological repercussions of physical detachment are painfully clear as Annie loses sight of her mother. Frantic she "stood up and started to call out her [mother's] name, but no sound would come out of [her] throat" (43). She feels as though "a huge black space then opened up in front of [her] and [she] fell inside it" (43). The

protagonist has no voice, is paralyzed, and, again, describes descending into some sort of bottomless doom. The rest of her senses fall away too: "I couldn't see what was in front of me and I couldn't hear anything around me" (43). The anxiety Annie feels is the first phase of a pattern Maria Mootry finds in Martiniquan poet Aimé Césaire's use of sea imagery in *Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal* as a "movement from anguish and ambivalence to affirmation and hope" (22). Annie's "anguish" is evident as the traumatic separation from her mother leaves her without the ability to function. Though she soon discovers her mother is only resting on a rock a little ways out to sea, her distress and fear will not subside. She begins to cry and realizes that because she cannot swim the only way to reap the comfort and security of her mother's protection is if her mother decided to return to her or if she (Annie) "took a boat" (44). Here, Kincaid is already proposing the boat as a bridge to identity, a metaphor she will expound upon when Annie indeed boards a boat on her way to England. Annie's story of this pivotal event in her life ends as her mother returns to shore, but just before she does so Annie says, "my tears ran down into my mouth, and it was the first time that I realized tears had a bitter and salty taste" (44). It is at this moment that Annie realizes that, like her mother, she has a sea inside of her too. There is an identity inside of her that is separate from her mother. Annie's anguish turns into ambivalence, as the physical separation she experiences on this day at the sea becomes apparent in every facet of the mother/daughter relationship. Annie's attitude and behavior fluctuate throughout the rest of the novel as she and her mother redefine their relationship.

In an analysis of Annie's experience by the sea that day from a colonial standpoint, England stands as the strong mother country, and Antigua cowers down as the dependent child country. Kincaid is proposing that at one time Antigua felt completely dependent on England for support. Kincaid suggests that Antigua was afraid of suffering a period of helplessness or paralysis without the support Britain provided. *Annie John* constantly reminds us of the fact that every aspect of colonized life is regulated by the mother country, for the bell of the Anglican Church wakes the family up in the morning, the British doctor provides western health care, and the British school system provides a specifically western version of history and literature. Fanon's contention that colonization causes the "young Antillean" to form a "way of thinking and seeing that [is] essentially white" is exemplified as religion, health care, and education create a westernized environment that impacts the colonized individual's sense of self and dictates how she sees herself as other (148). Emilia Ippolita, in her book *Caribbean Women Writers: Identity and Gender*, effectively illustrates how British colonization "constructed" Annie John:

> The construction of this particular self in relation with the Other is an ensemble of both difference and absence, in the process of re-version and identification of colonial past and postcolonial present, in a melange of historical memory of the colonial time and its mimicry in the postcolonial present. (142)

Ippolita draws an "imaginary line" between *Annie John* and Kincaid's non-fiction work, *A Small Place*, in order to discuss Antigua's "post-colonial present" in depth. In viewing

Annie John as a representation of Antigua, the island as a whole is also suffering through this "difference and absence." The "difference" between the colonized and colonizer's culture, in some ways, chips away at the native culture, thereby producing a sense of loss or "absence." This is clearly evident in Annie John's British education where her history class focuses on Christopher Columbus rather than slavery and during her illness when her parents, especially her father, have more faith in the British doctor's medicine than traditional Caribbean "Obeah" healing. Annie John represents a "melange of historical memory" as her personality is a product of British schooling and Caribbean roots. The two cultures seem to compete for a place throughout Annie John's coming of age, until her relationship with Red Girl allows her to step away from cultural conflict and into a natural sphere.

Red Girl is the embodiment of nature and freedom. She is another stepping stone in Annie's transformation or coming of age; therefore, it is no surprise that sea imagery emerges in their relationship. Red Girl is strongly tied to the sea in many ways. Her hair is described as "something amphibian and alive," and her face is "like a moon—a red moon" (56-57). The latter simile is most intriguing as the moon controls the tide of the sea just as Red Girl has a profound effect and control over Annie. In Moira Ferguson's analysis of the role of Red Girl she concludes that Annie "subversively copies the unconventional and mischievous" character (55). Ferguson suggests, at one point, that the relationship is a "self-directed apprenticeship" in which Annie learns a game of marbles from Red Girl, but, metaphorically the term is helpful as Annie absorbs the natural essence that Red Girl exudes (54).

Red Girl decides that she and Annie will meet at the top of the lighthouse. Kincaid is sure to establish the perspective they gain from that height as the narrator states that the first thing they did was to "[stand] on the balcony and [look] out toward the sea" (59). Then she tells of being able to observe the comings and goings of the village. Whether or not the order of the two activities is intentional, the view of the sea seems to function as a crucial part of her relationship with Red Girl. Both the sea and Red Girl help Annie connect with a natural world where she can gain a perspective on herself and her environment.

Annie's bond with nature here is reminiscent of Edward Brathwaite's "Sun Poem" where his subject, Adam, finds strength and peace when he is submerged in the sea. Adam follows a particular path through the water that is illuminated "like a road on a moonlight night" (*Ancestors* 189). The light imagery along with the evocation of Genesis in the subject's name demands a prelapsarian interpretation. The sea becomes Eden and Brathwaite describes it accordingly as Adams swims by "dips & hills" that are "smooth or covered w/moss" (189). Just as in paradise, the sea is a place of freedom, confidence, and independence for Adam. Brathwaite uses flight imagery to strengthen this metaphor as Adam "glides" through the water and "move[s] his arms on water like wings" (190). In "Sun Poem," the sea becomes Adam's connection with his natural environment and it is a source of empowerment. Annie John finds the same kind of empowerment in her contact with "Red Girl." She and Adam find courage and independence in their bond with nature.

The close of the "Red Girl" chapter signals the end of their friendship as well. Annie's friend is sent to Anguilla, an island quite a ways north of Antigua. Red Girl's

departure coincides with the completion of Annie's first menstruation, which further emphasizes Red Girl's significance in Annie's rites of passage. Moira Ferguson discusses the concept of escape in regard to Annie's relationship to Red Girl as she points out, "Red Girl symbolically goes north to freedom as Annie John does at the end. Again [Red Girl] represents Annie John as Annie John wants herself to be—escaping, having adventures, eschewing conventionality" (56). Ferguson extends her contention into the dream Annie has of rescuing her friend from her ship that she imagines "splintered in the middle of the sea" (Kincaid 70). The two girls escape their Antiguan lives here as well:

> I took her to an island, where we lived together forever, I suppose, and fed on wild pigs and sea grapes. At night we would sit on the sand and watch ships filled with people on a cruise steam by. We sent confusing signals to the ships, causing them to crash on some nearby rocks. How we laughed as their cries of joy turned to cries of sorrow. (71)

Ferguson suggests that Annie is "shedding her past and her memories" as well as "dissolving a part of herself (in problem solving water) that gains pleasure and grief simultaneously from her disobedience" (56). Ferguson does interpret the sea as an agent for change, but in this passage its "problem solving" is still part of an imaginary escape rather than the reality of a personal transformation.

The last two sentences of Annie's dream regarding the ships crashing evoke a post-colonial sentiment. Annie imagines a utopia in which she and Red Girl live off the land and are content. They are free of western intrusion and protect their privacy by leading the ships astray. However, at the same time, the "confusing signals" Annie and

Red Girl give the ships symbolize Antigua's contradictory communication with the western world both economically and politically. In Kincaid's *A Small Place,* cruise ships as well as English oppression (which also conjures up people arriving by boat) receive a scathing commentary. From an economic standpoint, tourism, via cruise ships, brings a wealth of consumers to the island and contributes to prosperity; on the other hand, the cruise ship industry has a disturbing impact on the Caribbean's people, environment, and ecology. Kincaid criticizes this in terms of oblivious, ill-mannered tourists who are only curious about pleasant aspects of Antiguan culture and turn a blind eye when confronted with the island's social and economic problems (*A Small Place* 5-9); this critique is reinforced in "Hex," part of Brathwaite's *Mother Poem* when the female character—both Caribbean native and symbol of mother nature—is desecrated by colonialism and tourism:

> [. . .] because her inheritance is swallowed by strangers:
> her houses, her beaches, the views of her landscape
> from which the youngsters sap milk
> are turned over to tourists: to terrorists:
> [. . . . . .]
> all the peaks, the promontories, the coves, the glitter
>
> bays of her body have been turned into money
> the grass ploughed up and fed into mortar of houses
> for master for mister for massa for mortal baas [sic]

her sands are now owned by the minister midas

and have been burned into careful gold brochures (46)

The sea and its shores become a commodity. Natural beauty becomes a colonial possession and is used for financial gain. Brathwaite makes the travesty clear. Kincaid's discussion of the effects of colonization and the onslaught of tourism in *A Small Place* also incorporates the island's difficult transition into independence. The economic support the British provided in the form of education and other aid (the context of *Annie John)* deteriorates after the island's independence. Kincaid pushes the decay to the forefront in *A Small Place*; she describes the dilapidated state of the library as a tragic symbol of the crumbling Antiguan education system. The library clearly holds profound meaning to Kincaid as her idyllic description of it in *A Small Place* reflects a similar sentiment in *Annie John*. Kincaid expresses the beauty she found in every facet of the Antiguan library, and the observation of her childhood memory deteriorating into those books stacked in "cardboard boxes in a room gathering mildew or dust or ruin" instigates her assertion that the library is "a good example of corruption, of things gone bad" (42); it is a public display of the government's nationwide neglect. Kincaid's frustration clarifies the conclusion of "The Red Girl" chapter in *Annie John* in which the protagonist and Red Girl — the embodiment of nature—are placed on an island by themselves, free to create and protect a utopia unsullied by colonization. Alas, Kincaid is sure to remind us that this materializes only in Annie's dreams.

In the last two chapters Kincaid uses sea imagery in two different ways. First, the sea is described metaphorically in relation to Annie's mental and physical condition, and

second it is described literally in terms of the effect the rains had on the sea and in turn on Antigua. In the chapter entitled "The Long Rain," Annie is bedridden through a three-month rainy season. There is little doubt of the relationship between the illness and the rain: "one day, just as mysteriously as my sickness came, so it left. At the same time, just as mysteriously as the rain came, so it left" (Kincaid 126). The sea imagery that is sprinkled throughout this chapter provides insight into the purging of the old identity and the birth of the new one. She emerges from the period of transformation with the desire and determination to leave Antigua as a woman rather than childishly escaping it in her dreams.

The prolonged rainfall in this chapter symbolizes confrontation. The water that she had once feared, and the search for identity that had once paralyzed her, is now precipitating down upon her. Annie cannot be saved or escape from this, and yet again paralysis returns for she is practically bedridden throughout the rainy season. In the following passage it is as if this precipitation is filling her mind, blocking out all distractions, and forcing her to face her self-journey:

> Then all the sound rocked back and forth in my ears, and I had a picture of it; it looked like a large wave constantly dashing up against a wall in the sea, and the whole thing made me feel far away and weightless. (111)

She has just returned from the English doctor, and it is clear that it will be a while before she returns from this "far away and weightless" place in her mind. The sea imagery not only conjures up her search for identity, but the movement of the sea suggests an active time for Annie rather than a dormant sleep which is normally associated with sickness.

The "large wave" of her burgeoning identity is constantly "dashing" around the walls of her mind, perhaps, trying to find a time and place to settle and bear the "weight" of a new life.

Annie's restless sleep does not produce the fantastic dreams of the utopia discussed earlier. Instead the sea imagery is used to describe internal struggle. In the following passage Annie is literally ingesting the sea's transformative qualities:

> I started to drink in the sea in huge great gulps, because I was so thirsty. I drank and drank until all that was left was the bare dry seabed. All the water from the sea filled me up, from my toes to my head and I swelled up very big. (112)

Kincaid leaves no room for doubt that her protagonist intends to face her fear of self-discovery and overcome it. She is not drowning nor paralyzed in this dream; rather, she is letting the sea circulate through every limb of her body and will purge it as a way to shed the apprehension and struggle she has been dealing with up to this point:

> But then little cracks began to appear in me and the water started to leak out—first in just little seeps and trickles coming out of my seams, then with a loud roar as I burst open. The water ran back and made up the sea again, and again I was walking through the warm soot—only this time wet and in tatters and not going anywhere in particular. (112)

When Annie awakens she has wet herself in her father's lap, which critics such as Moira Ferguson and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert interpret as sexual arousal. However, the sea imagery also suggests a self-discovery that extends past an awakening of her sexuality. It

is very similar to the last passage of the novel when Annie consciously describes her condition as though fluid is flowing out of her. Both scenes symbolize a release of old ways of being, to allow for a new self to develop.

Just as the rain makes the dry Antiguan earth fertile and susceptible to growth, Annie softens, allowing the seeds of maturity to take root. In William Conner's analysis of Brathwaite's *The Arrivants,* he finds that, while lack of water "depicts periods of degeneration," the presence of it, conversely, symbolizes "hope and growth," which, of course, mirrors Kincaid's use of it in "The Long Rains" chapter. Mootry's assertion of sea imagery is completed here as Annie moves from "ambivalence" to "affirmation and hope" (22). Conner also identifies water imagery as an agent of unification, which marks another parallel between Brathwaite and Kincaid. More importantly, the similarities mark a pattern in which Caribbean authors use water imagery to emphasize a process from dry, lifeless, and ambivalent to wet, fertile, hopeful and open to change and growth.

Because frequent rain showers and fertility are often associated with spring, Annie's transformation during Chapter 7 is in the rebirth phase of what Connor refers to as the "seasonal cycles of fertility" that he finds in Brathwaite (16). In *Annie John* the cycle generates two positive outcomes: first, it is the birth of a mature woman ready to separate from her home and family, and second, it is a return to and renewal of her Caribbean culture. Annie absorbs her African-Caribbean culture from Ma Chess, her ancestral figure, who comes to care for Annie after the British doctor's advice does not work. Ma Chess "settle[s] in" and makes her presence in Annie's life strong and impressionable (125). Annie becomes dependent on Ma Chess's entire being as she

"[counts] on her smells and the sound her breath [makes] as it [goes] in and out of her body" (125). Ma Chess feeds, bathes, and changes her clothes and linens, thereby fully saturating Annie in the Obeah culture. Just before the rains stop and Annie simultaneously recovers, Kincaid creates images of pregnancy and birth as Annie explains that she "would lie on [her] side, curled up like a little comma, and Ma Chess would lie next to [her] curled up like a bigger comma, into which [she] fit" (126). Here Annie is born out of and "fits into" the cultural framework that Ma Chess represents. The presence of rain and its connection to growth and rebirth reflect Connor's finding that water imagery is tied to cultural roots and national identity.

Viewing the "Long Rain" chapter as a metaphor for Antigua's post-colonial condition captures Kincaid's perception of the island's transition. Connor's claims apply here too as the rainy season makes the island fertile, thus susceptible to change as well. The following passage suggests the condition of Antigua after British occupation:

> 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 had 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. (*Annie John* 109)

As the British left, a new era rose upon the tiny island's shores, and brought with it new life. Independence changed the political, social, and economic shape and topography of Antigua. The narrator states that "the sea was bigger," and the shrunken island that is left perhaps refers to a smaller, more concentrated community (126). This is a community

with doubts about whether its new independence will prosper, which is implied as Annie John assures us that "in spite" of the general consensus, the island will "never [. . .]go back to the way it had been" (109). There is also a strong sense of the preservation of Antiguan culture as the narrator observes that besides the permanent rise of the sea, when the drought returned, "everything was the same again" (126). In other words, Antiguan life and culture survived the "long rain," or to assume a pun—reign—of British rule; and though this period will forever be a "great conversation piece," it did not deter the islanders from returning to their roots and past life. Annie tells of places and things that were "ruined," but gardens and fruit trees were "restored" and her father "put in a new foundation and continued building the house" that he was working on before the storm (127). Kincaid's word choice suggests a post-colonial metaphor as the island undergoes a "restoration" of sorts: the patriarch of the family cannot build upon the old "foundation" (i.e., British system), but instead must install a new one, reminiscent of Audre Lorde's admonition, "The master's tools will not dismantle the master's house" (98).

The chapter, "A Walk to the Jetty," concludes *Annie John* and is characterized by Kincaid's rhythmic language and strong sea imagery. Annie prepares for her "walk" to the sea and methodically closes each phase of her childhood by passing meaningful places such as school, church, and the library. Literally and metaphorically she puts all of this behind her and faces the jetty that will lead her to a new life that supports her transformed identity. Kincaid illustrates the significance of this journey further as the narrator describes it as feeling like a dream:

> [. . .] for I didn't notice the people coming and going in and out of [these places], I didn't feel my feet touch ground, I didn't even feel my own body—I just saw these places as if they were hanging in the air, not having top or bottom, and as if I had gone in and out of them all in the same moment. (143)

Here Annie's strong sense of place emerges as she imagines a formal farewell to the institutions that constructed her childhood.

As she nears the jetty, not only does the sea predominate as actual setting, but also the narrator increasingly describes her emotions in sea imagery. She describes the realization that she will not see the island or her parents again as a sensation of "[bobbing] up and down inside" of her (145). Annie's farewell to all that is familiar makes her feel as though she is being torn into "little pieces" and watching them as they "floated out into nothing in the deep blue sea" (144). Here, the sea imagery echoes the earlier passage when Annie was overwhelmed with the depth and breadth of the sea as she rode upon her mother's back (42). Her anxiety mounts, yet it does not lead her into the paralysis she experiences in earlier scenes. Even though she still harbors temporary pangs of fear and uncertainty about her transformed identity, she recognizes it as a crucial stage in her development. As she rides on the launch away from Antigua she observes that "the water became the customary blue, and the launch left a wide path in it that looked like a road" (145). In this passage the sea is Annie's bridge to a new life; it is a "path" that she initially feared, but now sees as a navigable "road" to her independence.

Certainly her mother is the final hurdle in her departure, and Kincaid, as always, creates a deceptively simple scene that is rich in meaning. Annie and her mother exchange a less than final farewell by simultaneously remarking "Well" (147). The fact that Kincaid makes this word stand alone suggests that both mother and daughter are doing "well" with their separation and are resolved that it is complete. It also implies that they have more to say to one another, which in turn suggests they will develop and maintain their relationship.

The final scene of the novel is another evocation of the day at the beach when Annie is separated from her mother. By paralleling these two scenes, Kincaid makes Annie's progress clear. In the following passage Annie has just begun to wave her red handkerchief and is standing firmly on the ship looking at her mother on the departing launch:

> Recognizing me immediately, she waved back just as wildly, and we continued to do this until she became just a dot in the matchbox-size launch swallowed up in the big blue sea. (147-48)

In past sea passages, a scene such as this would be followed by Annie suffering some sort of paralysis like that day at the beach when all of her senses fell away and she "started jumping up and down and waving" to her mother, and felt as though she was going to fall into a "huge black space" (43-44). Furthermore, the image of a small boat being "swallowed up" in the sea is quite frightening, but amidst this fear—Annie perseveres. In response to this episode Annie returns to her cabin down below and experiences a cathartic release:

> Everything trembled as if it had a spring at its very center. I could hear the small waves lap-lapping around the ship. They made an unexpected sound, as if a vessel filled with liquid had been placed on its side and now was slowly emptying out. (148)

Here, the sea imagery is not tumultuous in any way. The waves are not "large [. . .] constantly dashing up against a wall in the sea" (111) like they are earlier, but instead they are "small" and gently "lap-lapping" against the ship (148). She is not flooded with fear and emotion but instead slightly trembles as a "spring" (both as a source of purity and as the season of rebirth) allows this arduous struggle and search for identity to slowly drain, leaving a strong, confident, independent self.

At the end of Kincaid's first novel, *At the Bottom of the River,* the imagery and message elucidate the personal transformation that the author recreates in *Annie John.* The narrator explains in *At the Bottom of the River*, "I was not made up of flesh and blood and muscles and bones and tissue and cells and vital organs but was made up of my will, and over my will I had complete dominion. I entered the sea then" (79). Here, the narrator has transcended her physical world and has found the crucial attribute in which she finds confidence and strength. In *Annie John* the protagonist also embodies this strong will in several circumstances throughout the novel, but especially in the concluding chapter as she, too, "enters the sea." In the conclusion of both works, the sea is in a placid state, which seems to project onto the character as the narrator of *At the Bottom of the River* describes the sea as being "still, having no currents. It was as warm as freshly spilled blood, and I moved through it as if I had always done so, as if it were a

perfectly natural element to me" (79). Sea imagery is used here to unify the character and nature, and in doing so relays the character's heightened level of peace and comfort with her identity. The sea metaphor broadens as the character exercises her "complete dominion" over the difficult journey she deftly navigates:

> I moved through deep caverns, but they were without darkness and sudden shifts and turns. I stepped over great ridges and huge bulges of stones, I stooped down and touched the deepest bottom; I stretched myself out and covered end to end a vast crystal plane. (79)

The mention of darkness in *At the Bottom of the River* evokes the multiple references in *Annie John* when she describes emotional trauma and depression as a "black space" or a "black thing" (43, 101, 111). Here, however, acquiring "dominion" over one's will is the catalyst for emotional stability and even the low points of life are "without darkness." The sense of movement in the passage quoted above brings a sense of self-confidence and success to the character. Sea imagery is, once again, a source of growth, discovery, and strength: "How good this water was," the narrator decides; "how good that I should know no fear" (*At the Bottom of the River* 79). It is the same kind of fear that the protagonist of *Annie John* overcomes; it is a fear of the sea that also symbolizes a fear of transition from youth to maturity. As Annie pulls away from Antigua in route to the ship that would cross the sea, she begins to doubt her decision but remembers, "I wasn't a child anymore, and now when I made up my mind about something I had to see it through" (146). The two texts interact with one another in that the main characters are both expressing the same kind of experience; therefore, the

psychological liberation described in *At the Bottom of the River* can clarify and enrich the physical independence Annie John achieves.

Like Annie John and the unnamed character in *At the Bottom of the River*, Paule Marshall's protagonist, Avey, in *Praisesong for the Widow* undergoes a journey as well. Like them, Avey is broken down into a purified condition and travels through the "deep caverns" and "stoops down" to touch the "deepest bottom" of her soul.

Marshall was born in America to Barbadian immigrants, and it is clear that her strong Caribbean ties influence her identity and pervade her works, thus making them full of Caribbean and African-American concerns. Marshall chooses the Caribbean as the primary setting of *Praisesong* and uses sea imagery to move her American protagonist toward personal transformation and a reclaiming of her African-American origins. Marshall's emphasis on cultural identity elaborates on the colonial condition discussed in *Annie John* insofar as it broadens our understanding of a multi-cultural individual's struggle to preserve, appreciate, and embody her entire identity. As Marshall said in an interview with Daryl Cumber Dance, one of the main questions she has sought to answer in her novels is, "How do individuals, how do countries, and cultures achieve true independence?" (4). Charting sea imagery in *Annie John* and *Praisesong for the Widow* traces the multi-cultural condition in two significant phases of life as well as two different stages in Caribbean history.

While *Annie John* takes place before Antigua's independence, which was in 1967, *Praisesong* takes place a decade later and begins on a cruise ship which barrels down the narrow channels and charges into the tiny ports with hundreds of passengers eager to

explore another paradise in what Derek Walcott called "this chain store of islands" (53). Marshall does not offer a blatant commentary on the tourist industry's impact on the Caribbean; however, there are a few instances in which her opinion can be inferred. Avey's daughter, Marion, is introduced early in the novel as the child most in touch with her multi-cultural identity. She has taken several trips to Africa and works with inner-city children in Brooklyn. Marion opposes her mother's decision to go on the cruise, and as her African necklace "rattles" and "sound[s] her angry despair," she argues that her mother's choice of vacation is just "some meaningless cruise with a bunch of white folks" (13). Here we have white people on a boat uninterested in gleaning any "meaning" from their exposure to Caribbean culture. Avey's "racial mountain" rises before her as she shuns her African-American identity by immersing herself in "white folk" or western culture. For Avey, however, the cruise ship vacation is another symbol of her hard-earned acquired wealth. She is described as being "dazzle[d]," "awestruck," and "reverent" of the ship in its size and power, which in turn reinforces her ability to afford this lavish lifestyle (15). She carries a hatbox, a shoe caddy and four suitcases packed with ball gowns, summer suits, stoles, gloves, and other frivolous accessories to reinforce her status and her belonging amongst an upper class (13).

So it is the cruise ship—a symbol of Western prosperity, a moving city of "dazzling white steel"—that carries Avey to the Caribbean. As she sits in the baroque "Versailles Room" over a formal dinner, she becomes "chilled" by her thoughts of colonial oppression. Marshall is a little more overt here as chapter four opens with a description of the extravagant Versailles room followed by a recollection of Marion's

translation of its symbolic meaning. She rhetorically asked her mother, "Do you know how many treaties were signed there, in that infamous Hall of Mirrors, divvying up India, the West Indies, the world?" Avey, then, sees her reflection in the gilded mirrors that surround her and considers more seriously what her daughter has said. Avey gazes over the dining room and admits that the "fifty-odd tables [. . .] were like islands [. . .] each table and island separated from the others on the sea of Persian carpeting that covered the room" (47). Here, the sea is the commodity in which all of the islands happen to be placed; it is a material object that can be owned. In Derek Walcott's "Star Apple Kingdom" the travesty of commodifying nature is outlined through the "seven prime ministers who bought the sea":

> who sold it at a markup to the conglomerates,
>
> [. . . . . .]
>
> who retailed it in turn to the ministers
>
> with only one bank account, who then resold it
>
> in ads for the Caribbean Economic Community,
>
> till everyone owned a little piece of the sea,
>
> from which some made saris, some made bandannas;
>
> the rest was offered on trays to white cruise ships
>
> taller than the post office; then the dogfights
>
> began in the cabinets as to who had first sold
>
> the archipelago for this chain store of islands. (53)

Nature becomes a political debacle, a debate from which the Caribbean people are excluded. Instead the emphasis is on political manipulation and ensuring its path to financial gain.

The commodification and colonization of these tiny islands in the Caribbean make the preservation of culture for the native people difficult. In *Praisesong for the Widow*, immigrant residents in Grenada annually sail a few hours to their home—the small island of Carriacou—to celebrate their cultural origins, eat their native food, perform their native dances, and honor their African ancestors. It seems imperative for them to leave the mainland to reconnect with their origins and replenish facets of their cultural identity that perhaps wear thin in their daily environment on Grenada. Certainly Avey has lost touch with her multi-cultural roots and greatly benefits from joining the Carriacou people on their annual excursion. Her ignored past and unsettled inner conflicts awaken in her in the form of dreams and a physical illness, which compel her to pack her array of suitcases and flee the ship less than halfway through its voyage. By leaving this symbol of western power and domination she removes herself from the façade she was hiding behind. After doing this she begins to get in touch with the characteristics of an identity she had abandoned bit by bit throughout her life.

As in *Annie John*, Avey must first shed layers of her identity that leave her in an infantile-like state. Marshall does this in the course of several scenes, which begin at the hotel her first night on Grenada when she finally releases the grief and anguish she never allowed herself to feel after her husband's death. She cries repeatedly "Too much" as she realizes that the more money and material wealth they acquired, the more they moved

away from their cultural roots. She began to see her husband in the singular light of his profession, thus internally referring to him as "Jerome Johnson" instead of the "Jay" she once knew. Her true name, Avatara, had gone into exile as well: "The woman to whom [Avey] belonged had gone away, had been banished along with her feelings and passions to some far-off place" (141). Marshall is rather overt in conveying the extent to which Avey had exiled her identity. "Raging as she slept," Avey begins to experience her own "long rains," as her thoughts and feelings are precipitating down around her and her only choice is to succumb to her instincts. Just before waking up she dreams that she can smell a baby that needs to be washed and changed:

> The cloth had absorbed the perspiration with its slight odor of curdled milk, as well as the staleness of the Johnson's Baby Powder caked in the creases of baby fat, and had begun to smell. It needed to be stripped, given a sponge off, then patted dry, oiled and freshly powdered. (149)

The smell is actually Avey; after her physical and emotional release, exhausted, she had left the oceanfront door open and had fallen into bed fully clothed, thus creating the stench that manifests itself in her dream. The infantile state of "numbness" (Marshall 151) and disorientation that both Avey and Annie describe is a sign of their inevitable rebirth. Both Kincaid and Marshall believe that the current self must be "stripped" leaving a fundamental self to be "sponge[d] off, patted dry [. . .]." Kincaid describes the first stage of her protagonist's transformation in terms of "stripping" as Annie and her mother "had" to enter the sea without their swimming "costumes" (42). The social

façades or "costumes" are indeed removed in Annie and Avey's case, and in both novels the protagonists are ultimately cared for by an ancestral figure.

The ancestral figures are crucial characters in both texts in that they nurture the protagonists back to health and serve as a source to allow Annie and Avey to reconnect with their cultural origin. For Annie it is Ma Chess who provides the African rooted Obeah care, and for Avey, it is both Lebert Joseph, who coerces her to take the boat to Carriacou, and her Great Aunt Cuney, who pervades her dreams. Lebert Joseph is strongly tied to Legba, who, Henry Louis Gates Jr. explains is the "guardian of the divine crossroads, messenger of the gods, the figure representing the interpreter, and interpreter itself" (221). Legba is evoked early in the relationship between Avey and Lebert when she recognizes that he is a being that "possessed ways of seeing that went beyond mere sight and ways of knowing that outstripped ordinary intelligence [. . .] and thus had no need for words" (Marshall 172). Avey finds herself disclosing her dreams of Great Aunt Cuney and the series of hallucinations and physical illnesses that led her to leave the ship. Lebert interprets this as a call for help and guidance and reacts by inviting Avey to the annual celebration in Carriacou. Once on the island, Avey finds herself ascending a hill and meeting Lebert at the crossroads. She is also constantly noticing fluctuations in his apparent age. At one point he seems "an age beyond reckoning," which is then followed by a quick change of posture and gait that "throws off at least a thousand years" (233). Ultimately, Lebert serves as a messenger by guiding Avey to a place that supports and strengthens her fragile mental and physical state during her transformation, and fosters reconciliation with Great Aunt Cuney.

Great Aunt Cuney is very closely tied with African-American folklore in many ways. First she "resemble[s] the trees," a common symbol of strength and rootedness; she is also the storyteller who passes down a legend that remains indelible in Avey's mind. The sea imagery in the legend foreshadows a journey Avey takes later in the novel that is also a return—metaphorically that is—to her homeland. Avey's dream recounts a childhood memory of the journey she and her aunt took each summer to Ibo Landing, the place "where the waters in and around Tatem [meet] up with the open sea" (37). Aunt Cuney tells of the Africans who walked on water back to their homeland instead of succumbing to slavery. She feels deeply connected with the ancestors in the same way that Lebert Joseph does, and both of them wish to empower Avey with this knowledge. Aunt Cuney told the story to Avey so often that she was able to relay it to others verbatim. Avey is thus, early in life, being grounded as a Griot, one who will carry on this oral tradition. Avey senses her chosen path as Marshall clarifies that "in instilling the story of Ibos in [Avey's] mind, the old woman had entrusted her with a mission she couldn't name yet had felt duty-bound to fulfill" (42). This particular legend is replete with strong sea imagery. Here, the sea changes from barrier to bridge as the Ibo people reject their enslavement and rely on their will to carry them back across the Atlantic. Avey must also find the will and courage to take the hand that Aunt Cuney offers in her dream, and become the ancestral figure guiding her own descendents. As Walcott writes, "the sea is history" (25), and as Avey nears the Landing she hears the "distant yet powerful voice of the sea," which is what ultimately guides her to a place of self-actualization (Marshall 37).

After Avey's transformative night in Grenada, she heads to the sea with the naivete of a child. She walks along the beach and marvels over the simple wonders of the sea:

> the small marine life and non life to be found near the water. The sandcrabs scuttling in and out of their holes, the shells and coral scattered about [. . .] all came in for a close examination, repeatedly evoking the look of wonder and awe. (155)

Avey's mental and emotional state mirrors this simplicity and is crucial to her transformation. She embraces African animism and, like Annie, recognizes nature as part of her journey toward a true state of being.

Avey finds refuge from the sun and heat in Lebert Joseph's beach café. When Avey nears the café the ancestors emerge again as a "cool, dark current of air like a hand extended in welcome" (157). Unlike Aunt Cuney's hand that Avey refuses in her dream, this one "reache[s] out and [draws] her in" (157). Once inside she is calmed and soothed by this ephemeral force until Lebert discovers her. Although Avey gives in to being guided in many ways, her consent to sail to Carriacou with Lebert for their annual fête does come with reservations. Reminiscent of the anxiety Annie experiences when she is separated from her mother that day at the beach, Avey "heard herself blurting out in an almost childish rage, 'Those boats [. . .] I can't see how anybody would go on those boats. What if the weather turns bad [. . .] or the sea gets rough? You never can tell what might happen'" (182). Her fear of the sea, here, is a fear of instability, unpredictability, and struggle. Avey panics at the thought of risking the façade she has carefully crafted over

the years. Lebert Joseph reinforces this interpretation as he consoles her: "Is true. You don' know what's to happen in this life. We might run into rough water. Is a channel where two currents butt up and sometimes it has a little rough water there" (183-84). The imagery here has several meanings. First, Avey's false, westernized identity has been clashing with the surges of her African ancestry and African-American past. In addition, the currents can be viewed through a broader lens as the surrealistic, almost mythic Carriacou causes friction with the touristy, post-colonial mainland. Finally, the passage evokes an earlier description of Ibo Landing as the "waters around Tatem [meet] up with the open sea" (37). Marshall seems to want to make a distinction between the isolated American culture "around Tatem," the post-colonial culture around Grenada, and the vast sea that is the only way back to Africa. By binding these metaphors together, Marshall effectively unifies her major themes, thus conveying the monumental significance of Avey's tumultuous sail to Carriacou. It is her Middle Passage of sorts, and she must endure a degree of suffering in order to capture and reclaim her cultural origins and customs. Paul Gilroy also interprets sea and boat imagery as a reference to the Middle Passage in *Black Atlantic* and contends that "ships were the living means by which the points within that Atlantic were joined" (16).

Marshall connects the "points" of Africa, America, and the Caribbean before even setting sail from Grenada. Avey begins to associate her Carriacou experience with Africa as she stands on the dock and equates the "milling, moving tide of bodies, the colors and sounds, the pageantry of umbrellas" with one of her daughter's home movies of Ghana. In addition to the connection with Africa she also recognizes "the surging

crowd, the rapidly filling boats, the sheen of sunlight on the water" as reminiscent of a childhood memory in which her family, neighbors, and others take an annual boat ride on the Hudson River, another instance in which being on the water makes her feel profoundly connected to her race. Avey feels tied to them by hundreds of multi-colored silken threads "streaming out from her navel and from the place where her heart was to enter those around her" (190-91). These threads reach out to her neighbors as well as strangers "such as the roomers just up from the South and the small group of West Indians" (190). Marshall integrates this memory into Avey's experience on the dock in Grenada as a way of unifying the African diaspora. Marshall places Avey as a central figure amongst her race when she is just a child; during her time on the Hudson she does not feel "small, insignificant, outnumbered," but instead "for those moments, she became part of, indeed the center of, a huge wide confraternity" (191). Avey's childhood story is a foreshadowing of her journey to Carriacou and the connection she feels with the people there, but also the central ancestral figure she aims to become in her own family upon her return to New York.

Marshall relies on sea imagery to trace the final turning point of Avey's transformation. Once she is on the boat, Avey sinks even deeper into her memories of Tatem. The women who sit on either side of her and end up caring for her throughout the sail are interchanged in Avey's mind with women she knew from the church in Tatem, and the "odd cadence" and "vivid music" of the Patois calls to mind the "sound of voices in Tatem" (196). Avey experiences the fusion of culture and history from various places, which reflects Gilroy's contention of ships being a "living, micro-cultural, micro-political

system in motion" (Gilroy 4). Furthermore, Gavin Jones also cites Gilroy in his analysis of Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* which is completely applicable to Avey's Middle Passage experience:

> The black Atlantic [. . .] represents an element of black history—the element that must be crossed again to reach the cultural roots of an African heritage—while it simultaneously represents an area of cultural merger, of transnational black identity. (598)

Marshall emphasizes the "cultural merger" or reconciliation by describing, in detail, Avey's journey through the conflicting currents of the sea and her identity. In an email from Paule Marshall, she affirmed that the trip to Carriacou "enables Avey Johnson to rediscover her cultural center." She explained the "lesson" Avey ultimately gleans from her memory of the Ibo people:

> Moreover, it reconnects her with the captives at Ibo Landing and the important lesson they offer her: the need, that is, to establish a necessary psychological and spiritual distance between herself and harmful excesses of American society.

As in *Annie John,* the protagonist describes a hole of some type into which she uncontrollably falls which marks the descent of the old self. In both novels the protagonist falls into a dream-like, half unconscious state. Marshall is careful to convey this as a positive experience overall, and does so with the incorporation of water imagery:

> And as her mind came unburdened she began to float down through the gaping hole, floating, looking, searching for whatever memories were to

> be found there. While her body remained anchored between the old women [. . .] her other self floated down. (197)

There is a sense of serenity and relaxation as she "floats" into this hole, and remains secure as the old women keep her "anchored." As in *Annie John*, the protagonist's progress and mental state are conveyed through sea imagery.

In fact the old women become her anchors in a more literal way as this fluid descent hits bottom and "her entire insides erupt" (204). The women hold and console Avey as she violently vomits overboard. Marshall's graphic language effectively conjures the suffering Africans endured during the Middle Passage:

> And then she would be hawking, crying, collapsing as her stomach convulsed and the half-digested food came gushing from her with such violence she might have fallen overboard were it not for the old women. (205).

Even when the boat sails out of the "rough water" and into "a silken sea," Avey is still expelling the wrath of her body's "fury" (206-07). The "bloated mass" of her unwanted identity then moves "Down through the maze of her intestines. Down into her bowel"(207). Marshall's graphic description of Avey's release and the process of her being carried "barely conscious" inside the "cramped deckhouse" that had the "fetid heat and airlessness of a hold" reinforces the implication of the Middle Passage (208). Marshall carries the comparison further as Avey has the "impression" that a "multitude" of people "lay packed around her in the filth and stench of themselves, just as she was. Their moans, rising and falling with each rise and plunge of the schooner" (209). This is a

powerful and provocative theme that adds a viable and necessary component to sea imagery as a metaphor for personal and national identity.

After the tempestuous sail to Carriacou, Avey feels "emptied out [. . .] with the sense of a yawning hole where her life had once been" (214). Her sea passage, however, has proven to her that the life to which she refers was one that needed to be expelled. Avey awakens in the care of Lebert's daughter, Rosalie, who resembles her father as though "she might have sprung whole from his head [. . .] an idea made flesh" (216). Here, Rosalie assumes Lebert's ancestral role and—reminiscent of Ma Chess's intimate time with Annie—she bathes and cares for Avey. The fête Avey attends in Carriacou carries her transformation into fruition, and the silken threads that had been severed between her and her people were now "streaming out from the old people" and connecting to her (249). It was as if this was her ancestral initiation as the "aged dancers" followed Lebert in his "profound, solemn bow that was like a genuflection" (250). Avey's "true nature" comes out of "exile" (Lamming 15) as she stands "on top of the mountain free within [herself]" (Hughes 305); and when asked her name, she remembers that she is "Avey, short for Avatara" (Marshall 251).

In Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* and Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*, the sea rises underneath the protagonists and they glide forward through personal transformation and rebirth. For Annie, the sea first evokes fear and anxiety as she separates from her mother and comes of age; it then becomes a source of hope and rebirth as she evolves into womanhood. For Avey, the sea provides a journey back to her cultural origins as she releases her grip on wealth and materialism and renews her

African/African-American identity. Both women learn to manage the intrusion and oppression of western influence while they honor, respect, and embrace their cultural heritage.

The sea, the Caribbean Sea in particular, is captivating with its mysterious depths, vibrant life, and azure complexion. It seeps into the Caribbean author's spirit and resurfaces in their writing as the quintessential metaphor in describing the quest for identity. Whether the metaphor refers to a whole nation or just one individual, the sea acts as a dynamic medium by which complex binaries are expressed and oftentimes reconciled. Consequently, the multi-cultural woman is able to find her path downwind as a following sea guides her to a unified, stable, independent self.

A positive, powerful force in Caribbean literature, the sea becomes a sacred jewel worth cherishing. Caribbean writers expose the ways in which the natural environment of their homeland has been commodified and exploited. They are striving to protect and preserve the seascape that "heaves and breathes" inside of them and spills out onto the pages of their works (*The Arrivants* 57). Even though many of these authors currently reside outside of the archipelago, it is clear that the sea and its voice continue to guide them.

> *For the sea shell said that all who came from the sea, no matter where they ended up, whether whole or in little fragments, continued to carry a part of the sea with them forever and ever.*
>
> *"Tears of the Sea," The Snake Woman*
> *Olive Senior*

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Biography

Melanie Clore is originally from Fredericksburg, VA and graduated from Old Dominion University in 1995 with a Bachelor of Science in Communications and a minor in English. She taught and directed sailing programs around the United States but predominately in the Eastern Caribbean. Her experience living and working aboard sailboats in this archipelago inspired her interest in Caribbean literature and, ultimately, this thesis. Ms. Clore plans to teach at the secondary level this fall and is seeking schools with a maritime emphasis.