Annie John Study Guide

Annie John by Jamaica Kincaid

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Introduction

Ever since Jamaica Kincaid's work began appearing in *The New Yorker* magazine, it has excited critics and enthralled readers. Kincaid has been praised for her ability to tell the story of a girl attaining womanhood with all the emotion and beauty it deserves. Simultaneously, Kincaid expresses the significance and politics involved in that transition. Her second book, *Annie John* (1985), is comprised of short stories that first appeared in *The New Yorker*, Some critics consider *Annie John* a novel because the compilation of interwoven stories uncover the moral and psychological growth of the title character. This bildungsroman (coming-of-age story) has become Kincaid's best-known work to date.

Through Annie, Kincaid has brilliantly brought girlhood in the West Indies to literature as a masterful work of art. That art is a prose blend of European, American, and Caribbean folk forms of expression. The result is an effective rendering of a girl's struggle to discover her own identity. Annie is a girl growing up in an idyllic garden setting. At first she is the sole figure in that Eden she has only her parents and Miss Maynard to interact with and she maintains her sense of singularity when she finally begins mixing with others. Her omnipotent mother keeps the powers of the world and of death at a distance. Gradually, however, her mother introduces death and separation in order to mature Annie and prepare her for the world. The story of the mother creating the daughter is not unlike the works of Mary Shelley (*Frankenstein*) or John Milton {*Paradise Lost*) in the sense that the created becomes more than the creator intended.

Author Biography

Kincaid once said in an interview that her history began on ships and continues as corruption. By this she meant that the ideal human morality which the Europeans tried to disseminate with empire had instead become political, cultural, and moral corruption. That was the gift left behind as independence. Her island of Antigua is a microcosm of all newly independent colonies and the ensuing corruption. And Kincaid, like other West Indian people, is an amalgam of all who arrived at these islands by boat Carib Indian, African, and Scottish. Kincaid explained this to Allan Vorda, for *The Mississippi Review* by telling how the library (from whence she stole books as a girl) that was ruined by an earthquake in 1974 would have been rebuilt by the colonial administrator. "Antigua used to be a place of standards. There was a sort of decency that it just doesn't have anymore. I think the tragedy of Antigua for me, when 1 began to see it again, was the loss of the library."

At the time of the earthquake, Kincaid was living in New York and she had recently taken up her name. She was born in Antigua May 25, 1949 as Elaine Potter Richardson, daughter of Annie Richardson and a father of whom she will not speak. When her family's economic situation made a turn for the worse, Kincaid dropped out of the university. At seventeen, she was sent to Westchester. New York, to work as an *au pair*, or nanny. Kincaid continued to pursue her education, however, and studied photography at the New School and later attended Franconia College in New Hampshire. In her early twenties, the desire to write became urgent but she did not think serious writing was being done anymore.

Dreading to be known, should her attempt to write fail, she fished about for a new name. She was not familiar with the black power movement or other African-American political groups and so did not choose an African name. Besides, she has often said, the only thing she has in common with Africa is her skin color. Her consciousness is a construct of the western hemisphere. Reflecting this consciousness, along with her view of her history as a blend of corruption and boats, she chose the name Jamaica. Jamaica is derived from *Xaymaca*, the translation Columbus made of the Carib Indian word for that island, translated again into English. She chose Kincaid because, as she told Allan Vorda, "it just seemed to go together with Jamaica."

Soon after becoming Jamaica Kincaid, her writing came to the attention of William Shawn, editor of the *The New Yorker*, She became a staff writer there in 1976 and married the editor's son, Allen Shawn. In 1983, her collection of stories titled, *At the Bottom of the River* won an American Academy Zabel award. Kincaid followed up *At the Bottom of the River* with *Annie John* in 1985. In addition to writing fiction, Kincaid has published *A Small Place*, about colonialism and tourism in Antigua. She also continues to write a gardening column.

Plot Summary

Figures in the Distance

At ten, Annie does not know that children die until a young girl dies in Annie's mother's arms. Annie's mother (also named Annie John) must prepare the child for burial while Annie's father, Alexander, builds her coffin. Annie begins to see her mother's hands differently after this experience and, for a time, does not want to be touched by or look at them. Soon, after two more of her acquaintances die, Annie secretly begins to sneak to strangers' funerals. Then a humpbacked girl her own age dies. Annie runs to the girl's funeral after school, forgetting to pick up fish for dinner. She is caught lying to her mother about her mistake and must eat dinner alone and go to bed without a kiss. However, when in bed, her mother comes and kisses her anyway.

The Circling Hand

In the chapter's early pages, Annie describes her idyllic holidays when she and her mother bathe together and share her mother's activities. She describes her mother's trunk, in which she has kept all of Annie's possessions since birth. She sometimes tells Annie stories about each of the trunk's objects, delighting Annie, who revels in her mother's love. This life of "paradise" begins to falter, though, when Annie's body begins to change. Annie's mother now forces her to stop wearing dresses made from her mother's fabric and sends Annie to learn both manners and to play the piano, at which Annie fails through misbehavior. Then Annie accidentally catches her parents making love and stares at her mother's hand making circular motions on her father's back. That night, Annie behaves defiantly toward her mother for the first time and is silently sure she will never let her mother touch or kiss her again. The next day, though, she allows her mother to kiss her when she returns from her first day at her new school.

Gwen

When Annie first arrives at her new school, she is friendless and unsure of herself. After her teacher assigns them autobiographical essays to write, however, Annie shows she is the smartest girl in her class. She writes of a day she spent with her mother bathing nude in the sea. She lost sight of her mother and, afraid of the water, could not swim to find her. When her mother returned, she comforted Annie, telling her she would never leave her. Annie later dreamt of this event, only her mother does not return in the dream. She told her mother of the dream and received comfort again. Annie moves many of the girls to tears with this story. She does not tell them, though, that the story's ending is fiction. In actuality, her mother responded to the nightmare by warning Annie against eating unripe fruit before bed. Later that day, Annie makes friends with Gweneth Joseph, and they become inseparable companions. Annie soon becomes the first of her friends to menstruate. At school recess, in a nook of old tombstones, she exhibits her

menstruation to them and they comfort her. Annie returns home to her mother, whom she feels she no longer loves.

The Red Girl

In her continuing rebellion against her mother, Annie strikes up a secret friendship with the Red Girl, an unkept girl with red hair who loves to play marbles, a game forbidden by Annie's mother. Annie begins to see the Red Girl secretly, to play marbles, and to steal, hiding her treasures underneath the house. When caught with a marble, Annie lies that she does not play marbles. Her mother, not believing her, searches under the house for Annie's marble collection but cannot find it. After days of futile searching, she tells Annie a terrifying story of her own girlhood. Annie, moved by the story, almost tells the truth until she recognizes her mother's attempt to manipulate her. The Red Girl soon moves away, and Annie dreams of living with her on a deserted island, where they joyfully send misdirected ships crashing into rocks.

Columbus in Chains

During history class, Annie reads ahead to a picture of Columbus chained in the bottom of a ship. Annie loves this picture of the colonizer brought low, and she relates it to a story about her grandfather, Pa Chess, who was rendered immobile by an illness. Annie writes her mother's laughing response to Pa Chess's plight under Columbus's picture: "'The Great Man Can No Longer Just Get Up and Go.'" She is caught by her teacher and must copy Books I and II of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. At home, Annie's misery is compounded when her mother disguises breadfruit, which Annie hates, as rice and then laughs about it.

Somewhere, Belgium

When fifteen, Annie feels an inexplicable misery that sits inside her like a "thimble that weighed worlds." She and her mother are constantly at odds, though they hide their conflicts from others Annie has a recurring dream in which she thinks, " 'My mother would kill me if she got the chance. I would kill my mother if I had the courage.'" Since she has always been taught that dreams are the same as real life, the dream's words haunt her Annie daydreams of living alone in Belgium like Charlotte Bronte, the author of *Jane Eyre*, her favorite novel. One day, while studying her reflection in a shop window, Annie is taunted by four boys. She recognizes one of them as a childhood playmate who once almost hanged himself accidentally while she just stood by watching and who made her sit naked on a red ants' nest. When she returns home, her mother scolds her for talking to the boys, saying she acted like a slut. Annie retorts in kind, then goes to her room. She thinks about the trunk under her bed, which makes her both long for her mother and wish her dead. When her father offers to build her some new furniture, Annie requests her own trunk.

The Long Rain

Despite a lack of clear symptoms, Annie falls ill for three and a half months and cannot leave her bed. Corresponding with her illness is an unusual period of heavy rains. Her illness distorts her perceptions, one time causing her to try to wash clean the imperfections in her framed photographs, ruining them. Annie's grandmother Ma Chess arrives and assures Annie's mother that the girl's sickness is not like her uncle Johnnie's, who died from a curse after laying two years in bed. Ma Chess, an obeah (or voodoo) woman, becomes Annie's primary caregiver. On the day the rains stop, Annie's illness disappears. During her illness, Annie has grown taller than her mother, and she now feels repulsed by the world in which she lives.

A Walk to the Jetty

Now seventeen and willing to go anywhere to escape Antigua, Annie is scheduled to leave for England to study nursing. She mentally sums up her life, concentrating on her relationship with her parents. She says a polite goodbye to Gwen, who will soon be married, something which Annie vows never to be. She then walks between her parents to the docks and surveys the world she is leaving, feeling both gladness and sharp pain. At her ship, she bids farewell to her parents, both crying with her mother and feeling suspicious of her. The novel ends with her in her cabin listening to the waves making "an unexpected sound, as if a vessel filled with liquid had been placed on its side and now was slowly emptying out."

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

A girl says that when she was ten, she thought that only people she didn't know died. She came to this conclusion while spending her summer holiday at a house on Fort Road. Usually, the family lived on Dickenson Bay Street in a house her father built with his own hands. They were staying on Fort Road because their real house needed its roof repaired.

From the yard of the Fort Road house, the girl could see a cemetery in the distance. She didn't know what it was until she asked her mother what those specks of people were doing out there. Sometimes people would come early in the morning and her mother told her they buried children in the mornings.

The girl is afraid of dead people because she never knew when they might turn up. Sometimes they would appear in a dream or sometimes leaning against a tree. She knew that once they saw her, they would not give up until she joined them. Her mother had known many people who had died, including her own brother.

When the family moved back into town, the girl could no longer see the cemetery. Up until now, she still knew no one who had died. One day, however, Nalda, the daughter of her mother's friend, died. The girl's father built Nalda's coffin and carved flowers into the side of it. Because undertakers didn't prepare children, her mother bathed and dressed the dead child of her friend. The girl had a hard time looking at her mother's hands for a long time after that, and wouldn't let her mother touch her or help her with her bath. The girl told everyone at school about Nalda's death and they shared stories of their knowledge of death and they were each amazed.

The girl loved another girl named Sonia, who was a dunce. Even though she would torment Sonia until she cried, the girl also gave Sonia answers to the homework and even helped her spell her own name. Her other friends screwed up their noses when the girl would mention the dunce. At recess, the girl would buy Sonia frozen treats with money she had taken from her mother's purse. Then Sonia was absent from school for a short while because her mother had died suddenly. The girl couldn't bring herself to speak to Sonia ever again: she seemed to be such a shameful thing, a girl whose mother had died and left her alone.

Soon after, Miss Charlotte from across the street died. The girl tried to imagine what Miss Charlotte looked like dead, but she couldn't. She had seen Miss Charlotte lying in her bed asleep once and that's as close as she could come. Her mother did not allow her to go to the funeral.

Almost everyone at school had seen a dead body, so the girl started going to funerals to see what it was all about. When she would hear the church bell toll, she would find out

who had died and go to their home or the funeral parlor. However, the first time she saw a dead person she wasn't sure how to react because she had never seen that person alive so she had nothing to compare it to.

One day a girl her own age died. She didn't know anything about the dead girl except that she was the girl with the humpback. The day of the funeral, the girl ran out of school and headed to the funeral home, where the adults assumed she had been a friend from school. The dead girl looked the same except her eyes were closed and she was very still. As the girl stared at the body, she kept her fingers curled up in her palms to make sure she wouldn't point and risk her fingers dropping off right then and there. When she walked home, she wondered if the humpback girl would ever come for her and then her father would have to make her own coffin.

When the girl arrived home late, her mother asked her where the fish were that she was to have picked up for dinner. The girl fibbed, but then saw that the fish were frying in the pan. The fishmonger had brought them to the house when the girl hadn't shown up. As a punishment, the girl had to eat alone outside and her mother would not kiss her goodnight. Her mother did come and tuck her into bed.

Chapter 1 Analysis

This girl is obsessed with death. She wants to face it directly and makes a point of going to funerals. She also has a lot of superstitions surrounding death. She doesn't want any of the dead people's spirits showing up to get her and she doesn't want to point at the coffin for fear her fingers will rot and drop off.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

During the summers, the girl stayed in bed long after her father left for work. She could hear her parents talking as her father shaved, dressed, and ate his breakfast. He would quickly take a bath in cold water because he believed that it would strengthen his back. The girl bathes in warm water, and sometimes she and her mother bathe together. Sometimes they were just plain baths and sometimes it would be a special bath with flowers, tree bark, and oils added to the warm water.

The girl and her mother started taking these special baths after her mother consulted the obeah woman, who confirmed that odd things were going on in their house. If the girl had a scratch that did not heal right away, her mother dropped a precious bowl, or a friendly dog suddenly started to bite, these were all signs that someone had sent bad spirits to them. The girl and her mother thought these things were sent by women who had loved her father and had children with him. He had not chosen to marry any of them so they wanted to vex the girl and her mother.

On the summer days, the girl would be a shadow of her mother. They would begin at the market where she would learn how to buy the best fish and fruit and butter. She would examine each item from every angle possible and sometimes would return it to its place in the stall with an air of disapproval. The vendors knew of her discrimination and begged her to return the next day when the items would be perfect for her. During these outings, the girl and her mother always visited Mr. Kenneth, who would give the girl a piece of fresh liver. It pleased her mother that the girl was eating something so valuable for her red blood corpuscles.

The girl and her mother would then walk home in the intense morning sun. Sometimes her mother would wrap the girl in her own skirts and hurry her along as women hurled insults at them. Only after they had passed would she be released from her mother's grasp. The girl came to know that these women were some of the ones who had loved her father. She wondered why they only hissed at her and her mother; they never bothered her father, and when they saw him on the street, they acted as if they had never met him.

Lunch was always prepared from something purchased at the market: pumpkin soup, banana fritters, and salt fish with tomatoes. The girl watched her mother stir several pots and stood close by for tastings from her spoon. Her mother would also tend to the washing while lunch was simmering. She taught the girl how to lay the white clothes on the white rocks to bleach in the sun.

During lunch, her mother and father would talk and laugh and the girl was dizzy from moving her head to watch each of them. Her father was not a particularly handsome man, but her mother was so beautiful that she could have been on a coin. She could

have watched her mother talk and laugh forever. She always could make her father laugh. After he returned to work, the girl would help her mother with the dishes and settle into their afternoon routine.

The girl's mother had left home at age 16 after quarreling with her father. She left Dominica for Antigua with her specially painted wooden trunk lined with pink rose wallpaper. Although the boat was wracked by a storm, turning what should have been a day and a half trip into five days, her mother and the trunk survived.

The trunk was now stored under the girl's bed. In it, her mother kept mementoes from the girl's life. She would take out the items and lovingly touch them and tell the girl the story surrounding each piece. There were special dresses worn on each birthday, a blanket and booties, a christening outfit, baby shoes, and a notebook among so many others. The girl would sit very close to her mother as she listened to the stories again and smelled her mother's scent: sometimes lemon, sometimes sage or bay leaf, and sometimes roses. The girl thinks how terrible it must be for people who don't have someone who loves them in this way.

The girl's father was such a person. His parents left him with his grandmother when they set sail for South America, and he never saw them again. He would receive packages on his birthday and on Christmas and that was all. He grew to love his grandmother, for she worked hard to keep him fed and clothed. From the beginning, they slept in the same bed and that continued until he was a young man. He would come home about midnight from being with his friends and lie down next to her. In the morning, she would fix him breakfast so he could go off to work. However, one morning when he was 18 years old, she did not wake up. He never slept in that bed again and moved out of that house.

The girl was always very sad when she heard this story and would cry with her father. Her mother called them her little fools but she kissed them anyway.

The girl's life changed the year she turned 12. She was taller now, most of her clothes no longer fit, her hair was much more unruly, and she had sprouted small tufts of hair under her arms. Her parents didn't seem to notice the changes, or so she thought. However, her mother took her to buy fabric for a new dress one day. Up until now, they had worn matching dresses but today they chose different fabrics. She could never look at those dresses without thinking that this was some sort of separation.

The girl's mother told her that she was on the verge of becoming a young lady and there were things she would have to do differently. She examined herself head to toe in the mirror and wondered who it was who stood before her. The days of shadowing her mother were over. She was being sent off to learn things outside the house, taking piano lessons and learning etiquette. However, she would have preferred to return to the days when she basked in her mother's glow.

At the end of this summer, the girl started at a new school, where she was to study things like Latin and French. She had to be measured for new uniforms and shoes. She

began to look forward to the newness of it all. No one would know her there and she could be anyone she wanted to be.

On the Sunday before the girl was to start in the new school, she came home early from Sunday School and found her parents in bed. She would never forget the look of her mother's hand making small rhythmic circles in the small of her father's back. At lunch, she could not look at her mother right away. From the tone of her mother's voice, she knew that she had been seen at the door of their room. The girl was surly and vowed never to let her mother's hand touch her again.

When the girl went to school the next day, she was pleased to know that everyone had heard about her because she was so young and so bright to be attending this school. She liked two of the girls immediately: Albertine and Gweneth, especially Gweneth. However, when she returned home that day she gave her mother perfunctory answers to her questions and she especially didn't tell her about Gweneth.

Chapter 2 Analysis

This girl lives in a paradise, literally and figuratively. Her home is on the island of Antigua and she is surrounded by all the delights there: wonderful vistas, fresh fish every day, and brilliant sunshine to warm her. She basks in her mother's love too. She is an adored child who returns the adoration of her mother.

The summer the girl turns twelve all this changes. No longer does the girl's mother take her under her wing and keep her underfoot. The girl is becoming a young lady and the mother is trying to prepare her for her adulthood. Unfortunately, the girl perceives this as being pushed away from her mother and thinks that her love is dwindling. She is even further betrayed when she walks in on her parents in their room one Sunday afternoon.

The girl's body is also betraying her as she matures. Her only hope at revenge is to keep secrets from her mother, and she begins by withholding information about her friends on the first day of the new school.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Everything was new for the girl on this first day of school: her clothes, her shoes, even the road she walked on. She felt like an outsider as she watched all the girls pair off and walk arm-in-arm. She knew where her classroom was because she and her mother had taken a tour a week ago. She had also met some of her teachers already. However, she did not like that her desk was in the third row in the classroom. She would have preferred her customary seat directly in front of the teacher so she could show how quick and industrious she was. She was staring at the fuzzy hair of the girl in front of her when this girl turned around and introduced herself as Gwen Joseph. The girl told Gwen her name was Annie John.

For the first day of the new term, Miss Nelson told the students to write autobiographical essays that they would read aloud this afternoon. Annie was thrilled to be able to put her writing skills to the test so early on. She raced home for lunch at noon and raced back. As the afternoon began, Annie found herself sitting with the other girls under a tree in a secluded part of the schoolyard waiting to read her essay.

Most of the girls wrote of things that seemed frivolous and superficial to Annie. She wanted to read her essay to show the teacher that she was capable of so much more. Her essay told of the times her mother would take her to Rat Island to swim naked in the water, which was supposed to have healing properties. She was afraid of the water and wouldn't go in without her mother, who would ride her around on her back and sing to her in French. Most of the time Annie just watched her mother swim and dive. One day, she could not see her mother anymore and she called and called to her. Her mother couldn't hear her; she was sitting out on a big rock tracing patterns with her fingers. The girl cried until the tears stained her face, and when her mother came back to shore she hugged her and she felt much better.

Annie's essay concluded by saying that sometimes she dreams that her mother never comes back or sometimes her parents would sit together out on the big rock. When she told her mother of these dreams, her mother just warned her about eating unripe fruit before she went to bed. She left that part out of the essay because she didn't want her mother portrayed negatively in front of people who didn't know her.

Miss Nelson said that her essay would be put on the shelf in the library so the other girls could refer to it from time to time. The girl was lightheaded with joy, even though her mother had often warned her not to be too prideful. On the way back to the classroom, Gwen pinched her arm and gave her a lava rock that smelled of lavender. She thinks this is the moment they fell in love. From that point on, Annie and Gwen were inseparable. They told each other the deepest secrets of their hearts, and also knew which ones to withhold so as not to be judged in the others' eyes.

School improved immensely now. Annie was included in more activities and even became captain of the volleyball team. Her only real happiness was the time spent with Gwen. She was not so afraid of the thought of her mother dying now; that's how close she was to her new friend.

Annie was the first girl in the circle to menstruate. What seemed at first like an excruciating embarrassment earned for her some badge of honor and newfound respect from the rest of the girls. She fainted in class that morning and was sent home, where her mother waited with outstretched arms. Annie wonders how her mother can be so beautiful when she no longer loves her.

Chapter 3 Analysis

There are so many "firsts" for Annie now: her first day at a new school; her first pride at her writing skills; her first menstrual cycle; her first love, Gwen. These are all things that please her in some way because they set her apart from the others. The separation she doesn't understand is the one between herself and her mother. It's very telling that her essay includes the possibilities that her mother doesn't return to her or that her mother and father ignore her as they laugh out on the big rock in the water. She's trapped in that awkward limbo place where a girl wants to be like her mother at the same time that she can't stand the thought of it.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

One day as Annie was throwing stones at a guava tree to loosen a piece of fruit, the Red Girl came along, asked her which one she wanted and climbed the tree to retrieve it. Annie called her the Red Girl because she had seen her one day when each of them was out walking with their mothers. The girl had copper-colored hair twisted into tight little corkscrews that stood out straight from her head. It wasn't so much her hair that earned her this name but rather the fact that Annie could see her surrounded by flames: her house was on fire and she couldn't escape. In her mind, Annie rescued her and she would tolerate anything Annie said or did out of gratitude.

The Red Girl was dirty from head to toe. Her mother didn't insist on her hygiene so the girl ran barefoot all over the island in natural abandon. This was intriguing to Annie, whose mother made her wash twice a day and ironed her skirts until they were crisp. She and the Red Girl became constant companions. They would go to the top of the lighthouse to watch all the people going about their business below. It was important for Annie that her mother not find out that the Red Girl was her friend. Her mother would have never approved.

Annie still maintained that Gwen was her best friend, even though her mother approved wholeheartedly of Gwen. She never told Gwen about the Red Girl. She and the Red Girl met every day. Annie would tell her mother that she needed to stretch her legs for a while or she needed to do some on-site research for art class. Even on the days that Annie couldn't get away, the Red Girl would wait for her faithfully at the lighthouse. Their meetings began to take on a new dimension with hard pinches followed by kisses. Annie thought it was exquisite. She would sneak money from a safe at home to buy things for the Red Girl: hair combs, grosgrain ribbons; and rosebuds to pin on a dress. It didn't matter that the girl was unimpressed by these gifts; Annie just wanted to buy her things.

About this time, Annie's mother found out that Annie had been playing marbles at school. She punished her and went on a thorough search of the house to find the offensive little things. Annie maintained that she hadn't been playing, even though she had been on a winning streak. She and her mother were at an impasse, neither one letting up on her position.

Soon after, Annie started to menstruate and stopped playing marbles. The Red Girl was sent to live with her grandparents in Anguilla to finish her education, and Annie never saw her again. Annie dreamed that the Red Girl's ship wrecked but that Annie saved her and the two of them lived on an island forever. They would send confusing signals to the passing cruise ships causing them to crash and they would just laugh as the joyful noises turned into cries.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The Red Girl seems to symbolize the wild side of Annie. She loves that the Red Girl is so unkempt and that her mother doesn't insist on hygiene every day. Annie's own mother is a model of decorum and perfection. Annie's association with the Red Girl is also a way of getting back at her mother, who would never approve of the friendship. This pleases Annie just fine. She and her mother are battling it out as she comes of age; Annie wants to hang on to the childhood days, as symbolized by the marbles and her mother punishing her for still playing when she should make better choices now. Finally, she menstruates and the Red Girl goes away and it seems that Annie's childhood sails away with her.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Annie sits in history class with only an hour to go before lunch. She has been named prefect for the class for her excellence in the subject, but she knew in her heart that she was not the model for good behavior that someone in that position should be. From her seat at the head of the class she could see all the girls and she could occasionally look out the window without the teacher spotting her.

On that particular day, the students were studying Christopher Columbus and his discovery of Dominica, an island in the West Indies. Miss Edward was posing a question to Ruth, a new girl from England. Ruth didn't know the answer and Annie wasn't surprised. After all, her ancestors had been the masters of this land and she didn't understand any other perspective. Miss Edward reminded Ruth every day of her ignorance in island history.

While this classroom scenario played out, Annie found herself studying an illustration of Christopher Columbus shackled in the lower level of a ship. Apparently, it was meant to show that Columbus had gotten into too many arguments with people in the new land and they shipped him back to the king and queen of Spain. Annie found this pleasing, as she didn't like Columbus anyway.

The image made Annie think of a letter her mother had received from her sister in Dominica. Their mother was well but their father was having trouble with his limbs and had to depend on people to help him. After she read the letter, Annie's mother said to her father that the "great man can no longer just get up and go." Annie thought of this image when she saw the picture of the fettered Columbus: the great man can no longer just get up and go. Unfortunately, she had the bad judgment to write it as a caption in her book. Annie had not been a favorite of Miss Edward's and this event did nothing to further her cause.

Miss Edwards glared at Annie, saying that her impertinence has reached an unbearable level. Annie had gone too far this time by defaming the character of this great man in history and was not showing any remorse for her actions. She was sent to the headmistress, relieved of her prefect position, and ordered to copy *Paradise Lost* in only one week's time.

Annie was relieved when lunchtime came and she could get home to her mother's kisses. However, her mother and father were absorbed in some lengthy conversation over lunch and Annie was unable to share her most recent anguish and embarrassment.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Annie is too smart for her own good. She is a bright girl who is easily bored and gets into mischief much too often. She wants her teachers think highly of her, but she can't resist pushing the envelope.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Annie has turned fifteen and was more miserable than she has been in her whole life. She felt a heavy black weight inside herself, although when she visualized the weight, it was only the size of a thimble. She didn't know when or why it had come upon her, maybe only like a fine mist to begin with. She certainly was not one of those girls whose parents had died or abandoned her or any such woeful tale. She just felt unhappy.

Annie's relationship with her mother is still strained. They are able to put up a pleasant front for her father and the rest of the world, but things between the two of them were not good at all. She tried to rationalize how she could love someone so much and yet hate her at the same time. Normally, when she hated someone she could imagine them dead, but she could not imagine her mother dead. She could not imagine life without her mother. In fact, she knew that if her mother died, she would have to die too and she really couldn't imagine herself dead.

School had changed dramatically too. Annie had been elevated to a different level and was no longer in the same class as Gwen. The girls in her class now were two or three years older than she and were only concerned with how they looked. She was jealous, though, because they had bosoms to stick out as they sashayed.

Annie soon mastered the harder subjects in the higher grade and was either the first or second in the class. She still walked home with Gwen but it was no longer a gratifying friendship. Gwen looked small in Annie's eyes now as she rattled on and on about the things that used to keep the two of them enthralled with each other. Annie started to avoid Gwen, making excuses that she had to stay over at school. Something terrible had happened to their relationship but she could not tell what it was.

One afternoon, Annie walked home alone down Market Street, enjoying watching her reflection in the shop windows as she strolled by. Suddenly, she was confronted by a group of four boys who exaggeratedly addressed her in formal tones. She was immediately uncomfortable until she recognized one of the boys as Mineau, the son of one of her mother's old friends.

Mineau was three years older than Annie but she remembered playing with him when they were children. They would take turns playing roles in plays that they made up. One story they reenacted was the murder, trial, and hanging story of a local man who had killed his girlfriend and her lover. It had been the talk of the town, and the children wrote their own little play from the details they heard from all the adults. They built their makeshift staging and acted all the parts themselves. One day as they reached the hanging scene again, the rope tightened around Mineau's throat and each move he made tightened it even more and he was gasping for air. Annie was in such shock that no words would come out of her mouth. If it hadn't been for the boy's mother coming

outside to yell at them for letting the gate bang shut, he surely would have died. No one could understand why she didn't make any noise or get help. She couldn't make them know the terror that froze her at that spot where she stood.

Annie remembered this incident when she saw Mineau's face in the crowd with his friends. As she talked to him, she could tell the other boys were talking about her and making fun of her. She remembered another incident with Mineau when he made her take off all her clothes and sit naked under a tree. After a short time, the red ants started attacking her and he just rolled on the ground laughing hysterically. It was the last time they ever played together, and their mothers never spoke to each other again either.

When Annie got home that day, her mother challenged her on why she was so late. Annie made up a story about staying after school for study, but her mother told her she had been in a store downtown and had seen Annie making a fool of herself with those boys. Her mother told Annie she was ashamed of her, accusing Annie of ignoring her teaching and behaving like a slut in public. Annie simply replied "Like mother, like daughter." Her mother's only response was that up until this very minute she had been sure she loved Annie better than anyone in her life. Then she turned her back to her.

Annie spent the hours until dinner in her room wondering about her fate now. As she sat on the edge of her bed and swung her feet, her heels would hit the trunk that was stored there. Her heart broke at the thought of the happy life tucked away in that box, and she cried and cried for the loss of it. She also remembered that her mother filled that very trunk with her own things and left her father's house after a big quarrel. That night at dinner, her father announced that he would be building the set of furniture that his wife had been requesting for so long. Then he asked Annie what she would like him to build for her. She replied that she wanted a trunk.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Everything about Annie's life is painful right now. She is uncomfortable with her looks. Her relationship with Gwen is dwindling. She and her mother have had a major incident that threatens to separate them even further. She is growing up and experiencing the angst associated with that. All these things are temporary and somehow necessary. Change is painful, especially for a girl like Annie who is so smart, clever, and willful.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Annie's illness came upon her several days before it was determined that she should stay home from school. She was extremely tired and would fall asleep immediately if she even laid her head on her desk for a minute. Her mother poked and prodded at her but couldn't find any obvious telltale signs of any specific illness, so the only logical thing to do was to send Annie to bed.

At the onset of Annie's illness, the rains came. For a year, there had been a drought but that was not unusual for their life on the island. They were glad to see the rain at first but it never let up for the three months Annie was sick. The sea rose and crabs now lived in places that used to be dry land.

Annie lays on her small bed in her little room and listened to the rain hitting the tin roof. It was almost as if the rain were pounding her in place on that bed. She lay lifeless and uncaring. Her mother and father would stand near her and talk to her and to each other, but it was hard for her to make out what they were saying. It was as if their words fell to the ground before they ever reached her ears. She could just tell that there was concern in them and that their faces wore false bravery.

Annie's father thought Annie was worn out from all the studying she had been doing since she had moved to the higher class. Her mother said it might be so, but she didn't want to take any chances and was going to have Ma Jolie, the obeah woman, come to see for herself. Her father didn't protest, but didn't want anything to do with this voodoo thinking.

Annie's father thought they should take Annie to a proper doctor, so one afternoon he carried Annie on his back in the rain with his wife by his side. Her mother did like the doctor for his respect for eliminating germs and parasites and agreed that this was a smart thing to do. The doctor examined Annie from head to toe and could find nothing wrong with her. He thought she might be a little run down. Annie's mother was incredulous; she had always fed the child well, but said that she would add more vitamins and proteins to her diet and keep her in bed until this mysterious ailment had passed.

When the family returned home, Annie's mother put her to bed and brought her an egg cordial with two spoons of rum in it. Normally Annie would have resisted because of the awful taste of this concoction, but she drank it right down because she didn't seem to have any sense of taste anymore. Her parents still came into her room and watched her as if they could see something that had not been evident the last time they had come in. She could see their mouths moving as they talked but could not focus on what they were saying. The words just seemed to Annie to be one big wave crashing over her, threatening to drown her where she lay.

When Annie woke from a fitful sleep, she was in her father's lap and her nightgown was different from the one she had worn earlier. Her mother was changing her bed clothes and they told her she had wet her bed. She was fifteen years old and they were holding her and putting her back into her bed as if she were an infant. Again they just stood over her bed and watched her. They spoke to each other and she couldn't hear them or the rain, but she knew they were both still there.

When Annie awoke the next morning, her mother was sitting at the foot of her bed with a breakfast of cheese spread on bread and some chocolate with milk. These were some of her favorite things and her mother hoped it would coax her to eat a little bit.

The rain continued to fall. Annie's father stayed home to build furniture because it was too wet to build houses. One day when he was out, Ma Jolie visited. She put cross marks on Annie's feet, knees, stomach, armpits, and forehead, and then lit two candles, one for the head of the bed and one for the foot. Fortunately, all the rain would have driven out any evil spirits that could have been lingering outside so that was not a concern.

Ma Jolie burned incense and lit some tiny red candles. When she finished with her services, she could only conclude that there weren't any evil spirits in Annie's room or in the entire house for that matter. However, it didn't hurt to have Ma Jolie conduct these rites just in case any of the women who wanted to bring harm to Annie and her mother would hear that Annie was in a weakened state right now.

Ma Jolie pinned a little foul-smelling sachet to Annie's gown and gave her mother some ointments that she placed on the shelf beside the doctor's vitamins. When Annie's father came home and saw the old woman's ointments on the shelf, he was not happy, so Annie's mother put Ma Jolie's potions further back on the shelf behind what the doctor prescribed.

Annie's illness wreaked havoc with her parents' schedules. They watched her during the nights and vowed that one of them would be with her during the days. However, one day when her father was at work, her mother left to go to the market. She thought Annie would sleep in the short time that she would be gone. However, Annie didn't sleep. Her eyes landed on some photographs that sat in frames on a little table near her bed. One photo was Annie in her school uniform. Another was Annie as a bridesmaid in her aunt's wedding. There was a picture of her father in his cricket uniform. The last one showed Annie in her First Communion dress. In Annie's mind, the images seemed to expand to the size of the ceiling and then come back down to thumbnail size. They continued to do this for a while, keeping time with some mysterious music she couldn't hear.

Annie imagined the images were perspiring from their continual efforts, and when they finally stopped and were still, they smelled so bad that Annie could not stand it. She got up and gave each picture a bath with soap and water from her washstand. She dug into the pictures trying to remove any signs of dirt. When she finished, she dried them, dusted them with talcum powder, and tucked them under a blanket to stay warm while they slept.

Annie must have slept too, because her mother's screech and the sight of her on the floor cleaning up the soapy water mess awakened her. Even her bedclothes needed to be changed. Of course, the pictures were ruined. None of the people had faces anymore except Annie. All her father had to say when he heard about the incident that evening was that Annie just couldn't be left alone anymore.

Now Annie's mother could not leave the house. She had neighbors to help with the shopping and the fish was delivered by either Mr. Earl or Mr. Nigel, the two fishermen her mother trusted.

One day Mr. Nigel stuck his head into Annie's room to see her and all she could concentrate on were the blood and fish scales on the front of him. He was a nice man and she told him that he reminded her of her own father. He laughed and it seemed to fill the room and swirl into the deepest part of her so that she was filled up with his laugh.

Mr. Nigel and Mr. Earl shared the same business, the same house, and the same wife. The house had a door in the middle to divide their parts but it was never locked. Their wife was named Miss Catherine, but she didn't live with either one of them. She lived a few doors down and would visit to cook and all three of them would eat right out of the pots with their bare hands. Annie didn't know Miss Catherine but she knew that her mother didn't like her. Somehow, that made Annie think that she would like her.

Shortly afterwards, Annie's grandmother on her mother's side arrived. Ma Chess still lives on the island of Dominica. She surprised the family because she just showed up one day and they couldn't figure out how she got there because it was not a day when the steamer was due. Ma Chess joined the vigil at Annie's bedside. After awhile she announced that Annie's condition was not like Johnnie's, not like Johnnie's at all.

Johnnie was Annie's mother's brother. He had died at age 23, when her mother was only 13. The women in the family had adored Johnnie and still talked about him so much today that Annie half expected to see him show up as if he had just been running an errand. Johnnie had lain in bed for two years with some mysterious illness. The day he died, a worm crawled out from under his skin, lay on his shinbone, and died itself.

Ma Chess entrenched herself in Annie's room. She ate and slept with Annie and soon even their breathing was in sync. She was determined to stay until the child was well.

Just as quickly as the three-month rain had come, it ended. Just as mysteriously, Annie's illness also disappeared. The drought returned to the island and the islanders had to adjust to the glaring sun again. The rain had ruined gardens and foundations of houses but those things could be set right again. When she was convinced of Annie's return to health, Ma Chess left as mysteriously as she had come.

When Annie was well enough to return to school, she had grown so much that she had to be outfitted with new school uniforms. Although she was better, Annie had not regained her old spunkiness. She stooped and shuffled to school and made such a

pitiful sight that everyone talked about her. Even Gwen told her that she now had a different accent.

The other girls thought that Annie had some other new habits too. She would begin her sentences with the words "actually" or "as a matter of fact." It was as if she were leaving no room for doubt or any other opinions. If Annie didn't like the people she was with, she would simply leave without explanation. Somehow, the room mourned her leaving. She never mentioned her illness and no one asked but secretly the girls wished they could get it if they could also act like Annie.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Annie has come through her rite of passage. She has had her trial by fire in the form of her fevered illness going in and out of her head. Old things have no meaning and new things are her main concern. Since there was nothing physically wrong with Annie and there were no evil spirits around, this illness was her version of a transition to adulthood. Most girls can mope, cry, and act silly but this is not the road for this dramatic young woman. Everything in her life is bigger than life. All her feelings are the first time anyone has ever felt them. Her loves and her hates seem to be more intense than other people's.

Annie symbolically washes away her past when she washes all the pictures that were sitting on the table near her bed. Her instincts were moving her to wipe everything clean and start anew. When she returns to school, the girls sense that something is different about Annie, but they don't know what it is. They would like to have what she has now but they may never know it.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Annie is leaving Antigua to go to England, where she will study to be a nurse. She doesn't particularly wants to go to England or be a nurse, but she would do almost anything at this point to change her life. She begins her last morning in her room thinking of all the "lasts" that she won't miss. She won't miss her lumpy mattress or the sound of her mother fixing breakfast. She definitely won't miss the sound of her mother gargling every morning.

Everywhere Annie looked in her room, she saw something her parents had made for her. Her father had made her bed and all the other furniture and her mother had made her sheets and curtains, even the nightgown she slept in. She thought that that must mean that they made her completely. As she lay there looking at all the things that had at one time brought her so much joy, she was also glad that she would never see them again. This secret she kept to herself. She didn't want her parents to know that she never intended to return to this place. She was tired of the endless sunshine and the smells of the sea. She was tired of her parents more than anything. She simply didn't love them the way she used to, and she wonders when it all changed. She comes to realize that she is the one who has changed. They are the same as they have always been; maybe that's the problem.

Annie resents her mother's hypocrisy over the years, telling Annie that she loved her more than anything when all the time she was arranging for Annie to be gone someplace away from her - this trip now for example. So now Annie will be the one in control. She will decide where she will go, how long she will stay, and when or if she will return.

Annie dresses in the underclothes and jewelry that have been blessed by the obeah woman to keep her from any harm. She and her parents have a hearty breakfast normally reserved for Sundays and special occasions. To her, it seems as if they are in a festive mood, as if today is a holiday.

People dropped by to tell Annie goodbye and wish her good luck, but she could have left without seeing anyone and been perfectly fine. The only person she felt obligated to see was Gwen, but she was so disappointed in her friend's giggling and inane responses that when she turned to go she never looked back to see the girl who had once been her very best friend.

The time came to leave for the boat and Annie took her place between her parents as they walked to the dock. Along the way, they passed the buildings that still housed pieces of her life, and she was glad to see them go. Perhaps the only building she would miss would be the library where her mother took her even as a tiny girl. She used to love looking at the words on the pages even before she knew how to read.

When the family reached the boat, Annie's mother handed the captain a letter with instructions for Annie's passage from Barbados to England, and asked him to please watch over her. Her parents showed Annie to her cabin, which she was to share with another woman. Her father looked into her face and then down at his feet. He stumbled as if he wanted to tell her something but it would not come out, so he just kissed her and left. Her mother hugged her and told her that no matter what happened she will always love her and this would always be her home. They cried together for a few minutes and her mother left.

Annie went on deck with the red handkerchief her mother had given her so that she could wave and they could pick her out in the crowd. Her father was nowhere to be seen but she spotted her mother and they waved furiously until they were both just specks on the horizon. Annie then returned to her cabin to lie down and listen to the waves lap against the ship. To her, it sounded like the noise a vessel makes when it is laid on its side and the fluid gurgles out.

Chapter 8 Analysis

The day has come for Annie's independence. She has been separated from her mother emotionally for so many years now that she is glad to make the break. She has long outgrown her childhood friends. Even Gwen has settled into the sameness and will probably marry some island boy within the year and start the same cycle her mother started just 20 years ago. That life is not at all what Annie wants. She sees her mother now as she really is and wants to break from any pattern that might have the pull to suck her into it. It is possible that what Annie perceives as hypocrisy in her mother was really just her mother's way of easing her daughter into adulthood. Maybe every child feels that when being nudged out of the nest for each new educational experience. They do still love each other deeply but it's no longer the love of a mother and a small girl. Annie is a young woman who has yet to discover that it was her mother's job to force her away from her, and it's because of this that Annie is the independent, self-reliant young woman she is today.

Characters

Mr. Alexander John

Mr Alexander John, Annie's father, is thirty-five years older than his wife and has many unacknowledged heirs. He is a carpenter builder who brings humorous tales about Mr. Oatie, his partner in the construction business, back to the lunch table. These daily reports have the effect of emphasizing the growing tension between mother and daughter. During the lunch routine, they behave properly to each other and Mother rarely fails to be amused by his stories. Mr. John represents the world of masculinity for which Annie's mother is preparing her Until Annie is ushered into that world, however, it remains as distant as the haunting idea of boys playing marbles.

Mr. John built the family's house and made the furniture within. He protests against allowing the obeah woman to tend to Annie and he does not like Ma Chess. However, there is one moment of closeness between Annie and her father when he tells her of his own mother. Given the fears and obsession Annie has with her mother, this apparent empathy with Mr John is actually a moment when Annie vicariously experiences the fantasy of being like her father - sleeping with mother until the age of eighteen when mother, then, conveniently dies.

Miss Annie Victoria John

The title character is a precocious young girl growing up in an Edemc garden governed by her loving mother. This changes with the onset of puberty and the declaration of independence her mother imposes on her. A civil war breaks out between them not unlike the Angelic war of Paradise Lost. The more Annie struggles to be distant and different from her mother the more alike they become. In the end, Annie leaves the island with her own trunk, calling to mind the exodus her mother made from Dominca years before.

As the narrator of the story, Annie is at liberty to fabricate reality as she sees fit. Consequently, the line between myth or dream and reality is thin. She actively imitates her favorite literary personas, Satan and Jane Eyre, who moved into their own adult identities through rebellion and flight and recreated, in some way, the exact world from which they fled.

Annie also allows the traditional culture to exist with the present. She loves her grandmother and the magic her grandmother has. She is not afraid to give that as much importance as the magic of the schoolteacher and the doctor.

Finally, Annie dies to her childish self - the self that ruled the girls who gathered among the tombstones during recess and the child who hid marbles and stolen books beneath the house. This occurs during a three-month rain while she is ill. Recovery comes with the help of her grandmother and the realization that she is too large for her home - she

is now literally taller than both her parents. Not only does she want to leave, she must leave as a necessary step in her formation as a woman. She must take her trunk and go to a new place and build her world there.

Mrs. Annie Victoria John

Having fallen out with her father at age sixteen, Mrs. John packed her yellow-and-green trunk and left Dominica for Antigua. The boat she left in was hit by a hurricane and was lost at sea for five days. The boat was a ruin but Mrs. John and her trunk were fine. Annie's baby clothes and memories are kept in this same trunk beneath her bed. It is fitting that the mother's trunk comes to be used in this way because, as she says to Annie, "I loved you best."

Mrs. John is the benevolent goddess governing the garden from which little Annie observes the funeral, observes death. The paradise cannot remain such forever and gradually the mother introduces death and separation. She has formed Annie and she sends Annie away.

Mother's position is typical of Caribbean women. The women run the households and the men are sent out to work. Consequently, the children are indistinguishable from the mother while she goes about her tasks until it is appropriate to give the children their own identities. But in *Annie John* this situation becomes abnormally tense because there is only one identity. Furthermore, there is only one name. The mother fights to give it away while Annie struggles to take it.

Ma Chess

Grandmother embodies the traditions of the West Indies that Annie's mother abandoned when she left Dominica. *Annie John*'s father's preference for Dr Stephens indicates his desire to also leave these traditions behind. However, one day, Grandmother arrives and does not leave until Annie recovers.

Father

See Mr. Alexander John

Grandmother

See Ma Chess

Gweneth Joseph

She is the first girl at the new school to notice Annie. It is not long before the two girls fall in love and become inseparable. But, eventually, Annie becomes bored with Gwen and in the end comes to see Gwen as a silly, giggling, schoolgirl come to bid farewell. She tells Annie of her engagement and receives a humored blessing. Annie stands inwardly amazed that she ever loved Gwen.

Little Miss

See Miss Annie Victoria John

Mineu

Mmeu is a playmate of Annie's and the only boy close to her age in the narrative. When together, Annie and Mineu liked to reenact local events. This play leads Mineu to fake his own hanging in order to imitate an actual hanging. Annie watches as it goes wrong. She is unable to move. Luckily a neighbor comes and saves the boy. Years later she meets him in the street. They simply say "hello." Meanwhile, his friends snicker and poke each other while Annie's mother catches sight of the scene. Later, her mother calls her a slut for talking to him.

Mother

See Mrs. Annie Victoria John

Red Girl

The Red Girl embodies the very antithesis of what Annie has been taught to be proper. They meet when the Red Girl climbs a tree to collect a guava in a manner normally reserved to boys. She is dirty, smelly, and plays marbles with the boys. Annie embraces and kisses her, as the ultimate rebellion against her mother's notions. It is the temptation of the Red Girl that leads Annie into a "series of betrayals of people and things."

Ruth

The daughter of the Anglican minister doesn't fare well in Antigua Ruth is one of the few English children in the community She is an embarrassed blonde who is frequently the class dunce. Annie thinks that Ruth would rather be home in England "where no one would remind her constantly of the terrible things her ancestors had done."

Dr. Stephens

The family doctor is an Englishman named Dr. Stephens. He represents modern science and has served the family through Annie's other illnesses - like hookworm. Mother agrees with his theory that germs need to be rooted out and destroyed. He represents modern science and is approved of by Mr. John, but his medicinal prescriptions prove ineffectual against Annie's debilitating depression.

Themes

Death

Death enters the frame of *Annie John* at the outset and never leaves. As a distant event observed by Annie, death serves as a counter reality to Annie's position as the beloved of her mother. Consequently, Annie's obsession with this other reality keeps the possibility of separation as the end of her blissful girlhood absolutely hidden. Death also serves to exaggerate the distance of the story and, thus, hide the narrator. In the first sentence, therefore, the adult narrator transforms into a girl fascinated by the apparently abstract concept of death.

There is a literal graveyard in the distance that Annie sees figures, not people per se, enter and leave. Death comes closer when Nalda, Sonia's mother, and then Miss Charlotte die. Annie is attentive to this facet of life and watches it. She observes funerals. She notes where death is. Yet she does not grieve. Annie wants to touch death by touching the hunched back of a dead girl whose funeral she attends for the purpose of observation. Disturbing Annie's peace, however, death nears her twice through the person of her mother who was holding Nalda and talking to Miss Charlotte when they died. These two events foreshadow the discovery of imperfection in Annie's universe.

Death does not come to Annie but she dies to three things: her girlhood, her mother, and her home. The first two take place through inevitable growth events. There is much that marks Annie as becoming a woman and, therefore, rivaling her mother for ownership of their shared name. The two primary events are her first menstruation and her illness. Her first menstruation is full of death images beyond the obvious significance of biological change - she faints because, she says, "I brought to my mind a clear picture of myself sitting at my desk in my own blood." Her illness is a mock death. When she comes forth from her sick bed she is taller and no longer seems to be of the Antiguan world.

Identity

The central struggle, or agon, in Annie's story is her struggle to bring forth her own identity. That identity is fulfilled through the scripted story of the trunk - she will have her identity when she leaves bearing her trunk. This struggle involves mood swings, rebellious adventures, the awakening of sexuality, and a coming to terms with historical reality. However, the person on whom this straggle is focused, and who has some responsibility in its instigation, is her mother. The mother-daughter tension dominates the work. The tension is not eased though Annie's straggle meets with success. She gains an identity despite her adult telling of her story - in which she clearly becomes a woman in her mother's image - actual reconciliation is absent. Annie's trunk carrying identity, then, is a death to her self and loss of her mother.

Life as a child is set up as Edenic. Annie is indistinguishable from her mother and happiness reigns That is, until the day her mother says they are now separate. The demand for Annie to suddenly be independent, to have her own subjectivity, is the high of the book. It arrives hi Chapter 2, the central image is that of her parents having sex and particularly "The Circling Hand" of her mother on her father's back. At that point, Annie says, "To say that I felt the earth swept away from under me would not be going too far." Her model of the universe - a dual universe with two beings in one dress fabric - had suddenly become a universe of independent bodies all doing their own things to their own ends. The rest of the work details the way in which Annie puts herself back together and finds her own reflection. She had been seeing herself as a smaller version of her mother but gradually she sees her own reflection in a shop window. She reminds herself of "Satan just recently cast out of heaven." Eventually, identity formation leads her to a figurative death. Her recovery from her illness is also her arrival at her identity as a woman Recovered, she is taller, conscious of her power as a woman who knows herself, and with her new wisdom she sees she has outgrown the very island of Antigua.

Annie uses several tools to form her identity. The first is her body. Her prowess and strength affords her respect from her classmates and captainship of the volleyball team. The other tool is her intellect. Being above average, she is not delinquent in opportunities to boost her confidence. But this does not prove as important as knowledge gained by observing people at home and hearing stories. One such story is of her mother's departure from Dominica. Annie knows the story well and, therefore, always has an example of strong womanhood before her. She also knows the story of her father, but she rejects his narrative although she empathizes with his tragedy. There are other narratives she rejects. Uncle John was a promising young man who died young. Annie notes that his belongings are kept in a trunk. Annie's things are in a trunk, too, but she decides to follow her mother's narrative and leave Antigua with a trunk - a new one - rather than follow the other narratives which both involve death. Re-enforcing her choice is Charlotte Bronte's story of Jane Eyre, whose heroine also strikes out on her own.

Post-Colonialism

Post-colonialism is a literary theory developed in response to the literature being written by people in countries previously governed by the British crown. In the years since the granting of independence, the people of these nations have had to reconcile their identity as educated British subjects with their awareness of their own subjugation by that government brought about by sudden self-determination. This resonates directly with Annie's identification with Jane Eyre as well as references to Milton and Shakespeare Annie has been taught English literature - stories from the land of the former colonial administration. However, the post-colonial writer does not reject this literature; instead, she embraces it as her own. She also embraces the English tongue as her language, but now she will use them to tell her own story.

There are many references to the history of colonialism in *Annie John*, but two key moments involve a classmate named Ruth and Christopher Columbus Both occur m

Chapter 5, "Columbus in Chains," but resonate throughout the entire work. Being a good student with aspirations, Annie has trouble remembering the reality of her heritage or discerning whether she fits m "with the masters or the slaves - for it was all history, it was all in the past, and everybody behaved differently now." Still, there is some remembering and hard feelings over the past. Annie says of Ruth, "Perhaps she wanted to be in England, where no one would remind her [what] her ancestors had done."

Crucial to Annie's understanding of herself as a post-colonial subject is her crime against history. She is caught not paying attention to a history lesson, but she is punished for defacing her school-book in a way that was blasphemous. "I had gone too far this time," she says, "defaming one of the great men in history, Christopher Columbus, discoverer of the island that was my home." Annie is aware of how tenuous is the idea that this island is her home. She is here only as the curious result of Empire. Still, it is her home just as English culture is hers but with a little obeah thrown in.

Style

Point of View

The first person ("I") retrospective narrative is constructed with episodes. The prime person in *Annie John* is, of course, Annie. Therefore, the Antigua shown the reader is that which is filtered through Annie. There are eight episodes highlighted in the chapter headings. During each episode more information is given about Annie. The timeline jumps but there is a steady progression from Annie as a young girl to her departure from home as a young woman.

This narrative, however, is ironic because an adult Annie establishes the reality of the story as if it was the perspective of little Annie. In other words, Annie knows her own story's outcome but tries not to reveal this. The novel opens by literally noticing figures in a distance and also by placing the story at a distance, "during the year I was ten." Thus the effort on the part of the young Annie to show her mother as an Old Testament deity is offset by the adult attempt to reconcile. The mother remains beautiful and loved though the literal story might say she is simply left behind.

Symbolism

The most important symbol of the work is the trunk. Each of the characters has a trunk - a place where their identify formation blocks are kept. In the case of Uncle John, it is all that is left. For Annie, the trunk with all of her baby things is a fun thing to clean out because she then hears stories about herself. When she leaves Antigua, Annie - like her mother when she left Dominica - takes a new trunk to build a new life. Father has a trunk but it is not solid. Father's trunk is everywhere. It is made up of all the women and illegitimate children that Annie and her mother ran into. It is made up of the house and furniture he built. He adds to this trunk daily with stones about work because there is no one who wants to tell his story - Mother is busy with Annie's story.

Irony

Irony is akin to an "inside joke." It occurs when the intended meaning is the opposite of what is actually said. Kincaid offers many wonderful moments of irony. One example is in Chapter 5, when Annie says that colonialism is past and now "all of us celebrate Queen Victoria's birthday." It is a rather sudden cultural reference in the midst of a paragraph about the past. Many things happen in the phrase. Annie has been saying that the past is behind them, yet they still celebrate some queen's birthday. She is also noting that the personification of colonialism (the reign of Queen Victoria was the heyday of the Empire) remains as a national holiday.

More of these ironic moments involve works of literature. For example, on the desk of Miss Nelson, an Englishwoman, is an elaborate edition of Shakespeare's play The

Tempest. She is reading this work while the girls are writing their autobiographical essays. The irony is that on the one hand, the teacher is simply reading one of the great plays of English literature. The deeper implication is very complex because that play has become a grand touchstone for all post-colonial writers, especially those of the Caribbean. The reason is this: many intellectuals of those islands read that play as the moment of conquest, as if Shakespeare was writing the reality of colonialism into effect with his play. Further, the figure of Caliban - a person brought to the island to labor - mixes his identity with the spirit of the island, Sycorax. Caliban is a slave who has learned English so that he can curse his master. The children writing their essays are a result of the same process - brought to the island and now expected to peacefully get along with their former masters. Particularly, Annie's narrative involves her being stranded on a little island - like the characters in the play - but unable to call to her mother. She, like Caliban, yells at her master but there can be no understanding.

Dream Vision

Unlike the culture whose literature she adores (in Jane Eyre, for example, mythology has been banished from England), Annie does not divide the mythical from reality. Kincaid uses this in the narrative itself, so that dreams and myth are written in and make up her characters. The result of this is the legitimating of oral tradition. The first instance of this appears early in the novel and concerns the dead. Annie reports that "sometimes they showed up in a dream, but mat wasn't so bad, because they usually only brought a warning." Another example of this technique comes when Kincaid has Annie recite her autobiographical essay. This essay is atypical because in some sense it is a very mature psychological metaphor but it also mythologizes the mother-daughter relationship. A final example is the event of Annie's and Mother's "black things," subjective demons, wrestling on the lunch table only to return - never to grapple again - to their rightful owners. This blending of realities validates dreaming as a way of thinking; it carries on the traditions represented by the obeah woman and Ma Chess,

Historical Context

Contact, Colonialism, and Independence

Originally inhabited by the Siboney people, the Island of Antigua, the setting for Kincaid's *Annie John*, was populated by Arawak and Carib Indians when Christopher Columbus arrived there during his second voyage in 1493. He named the island after a church in Sevilla, Spain, named Santa Maria de la Antigua. Thirty years later it became an outpost of the Spanish Conquistadors. In 1629, the French made a base there as Spanish power descended and the British had not yet taken control. French control was brief, however, and the English arrived in 1632. The Treaty of Breda formalized this situation in 1667.

From 1674 to 1834, the island was one large sugar plantation. Slaves were imported from Africa because the indigenous peoples fled or had been killed. The end of slavery brought freedom but no opportunity to be free. For the next hundred years, Antigua and surrounding islands were under the jurisdiction of one and then another federation. Greater independence was achieved in 1967, with statehood within the British Commonwealth granted in 1981. Finally the seven islands of the East Caribbean formed a merger. The single nation of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) came into being in 1987 and included the former British colonies: Antigua, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla, St. Vincent, Tobago, and Trinidad.

Latin America and the Caribbean

The 1980s was a troubled decade for the nations of Latin America and the Caribbean. Warily, they attempted to cease being the playground and raw material supplier of Europe and America. In doing so, they strengthened old trading alliances and forged new ones. Meanwhile, the United States began to create NAFTA with Canada and Mexico, while Europe moved closer to unionization In addition to economic competition, the United States practiced active interventionism.

Acting out of the Monroe Doctrine - that the United States will not tolerate interference by any European power (including Russia) in the affairs of the Western Hemisphere - and the precedent set by President Theodore Roosevelt, the United States intervened everywhere to both good and bad effect.

In the late 1990s, the U.S. still enforced a trade embargo against Cuba that had been in effect since 1959. It may never be known just how involved the United States was in the turmoil that disrupted life in El Salvador and Nicaragua throughout the 1980s. Nor will the full story of Haiti's troubles be known. Less mysterious, however, were the invasions of Grenada in 1983 and Panama in 1989. In the first case, the Reagan administration acted in reaction to a coup, the potential endangerment of U.S. medical students, and

the fear of even closer ties between Grenada and Cuba. The leader of Panama, on the other hand, was accused of laundering drug money. He was arrested in the invasion and began serving a sentence of forty years in the United States.

The 1980s in the United States

The decade of the eighties was original only in the way that culture in the United States sought to blend its past into the now. It was marked by pastiche, superficiality, recreations of old movie serials, nostalgia for a golden age that only ever existed or television, and "culture wars." The economy hummed at the surface with any sort of lifestyle and time available for consumption. Meanwhile, corporate mergers, downsizing, and an abrupt shift toward service economy left industrial America partially unemployed and the labor movement - beginning with the air-traffic controllers' strike of 1981 drastically weakened. To offset this industrial downsizing, the government embarked on an awesome weapons program. The result was an incomprehensible debt and a huge pile of nuclear warheads that nobody wants to ever, ever, use. It seemed to be a decade of deciding what to do - no clear answer has yet emerged.

Race Relations

The Civil Rights movement encountered a backlash in the 1980s for which it was unprepared. Leaders of the movement knew the highpoint and victories of the 1960s were past but they could hardly believe that the Miami riots of 1980 announced a decade of violence. Membership in neo-Nazi and Ku Klux Klan groups rose while racially motivated hate-crimes increased in frequency. Normally tolerant environments, like college campuses, reflected this trend. The climate of the nation had suddenly become conservative.

Elections in the 1980s reflected the drastic change. Reverend Jesse Jackson, considered by many to be the successor to Martin Luther King Jr., ran twice for president in 1984 and 1988 as a Democrat. But the 1980s instead saw Republican President Ronald Reagan complete two terms of office that were succeeded by George Bush. Reagan won in a landslide because the populace felt that change might have occurred too fast. The brakes were applied and civil rights victories began to be overturned. In 1987, legendary civil rights activist and the first black to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court, Justice Thurgood Marshall, expressed his opinion that President Reagan was ranked at the bottom in terms of civil rights for all Americans, black or white. In a symbolic capping off of the decade, the elections of 1989 brought Republican David Duke, a former Ku Klux Klan grand wizard, to the Louisiana state legislature. Much to the relief of everyone, including the embarrassed Republican Party. Duke's bid for the U.S. Senate was unsuccessful.

Critical Overview

Response to *Annie John* has been unanimous in its praise. Reviewers focus on Kincaid's successful writing of a girl's coming of age as well as the wonder and excitement of a historic epicenter - the Caribbean. More serious views of the work simply explore this theme further by investigating the family as represented in the story and as existing in the West Indies. Critics have also noticed aspects of the novel which break new ground. For example, the harmony with which Kincaid treats the blending of obeah and modern medicine.

First reviews of the work in 1985 were excited, glowing, and attentive to Kincaid's prose ability. Paula Bonnell wrote in *The Boston Herald*, that the publication of Kincaid's first two books were "eagerly awaited events." Both, she continues, "are recreations of the self in that emotional country where dreams and what might have happened are part of the truest story of one's life." Jacqueline Austin agreed. She wrote a review in VLS months later saying, "Kincaid does write what she knows, what she knows is rare: pure passion, a past filled with curious events, a voice, and above all a craft." Austin also comments in passing about heritage. She names other writers from the West Indies to say that Kincaid is in a group trying to "encompass two traditions." She doesn't go much further nor does she say which two traditions. John Bemrose is more particular in his review for *Maclean's Magazine*. He says, 'The instrument of Kincaid's success is a prose style whose subtly varied cadences suggest the slow, dignified pace of life in colonial Antigua. She also knows her way around the human heart." In the *Times Literary Supplement* in the fall of 1985, Ike Onwordi adds nothing new. He glosses over the fact that Kincaid's work is an "episodic" autobiography using "language that is poetic without affectation."

Heavier analysis of *Annie John* followed slowly. In 1990, H. Adlai Murdoch wrote an article for *Callaloo*, entitled, "Severing the (M)other Connection: The Representation of Cultural Identity in Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*" where he attempted to reconfigure the Oedipal tools of Freud for an utterly matriarchal order. Murdoch argues that as Caribbean writers began to create their own literature free of the burden of empire, they must confront the Oedipal tensions of identity formation. Such a reading assumes that the only route to the child's, or the newly independent nation's, subjectivity is by confrontation and overthrow of the father, or ruling power. Only then can the child own his culture, or mother. "The issue of subjectivity, beset with problems such as recognition of self and other and oedipal conflict under the most conventional circumstances, is complicated further here given the additional factors of colonialism and pluralism which continue to mark Caribbean society and culture." Fortunately, Murdoch does not belabor Freud's script but adds Lacan's notion of mirror as well as the more deconstructionist notion of phallic signifier. Together they enable a reading in which Annie's mother is the main power broker against whom Annie struggles, as would the son against the father in traditional Freudian readings, to attain her independent subjectivity. This analysis stays within the realm of psychological interpretation despite its promise to link post-colonial facets as well.

More recent criticism reflects post-colonial theory and views Kincaid as a post-colonial writer Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin wrote the book on post-colonialism in 1989 - *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. The theory arises out of the historical fact that English literature as a discipline arose concurrently with the pressures of Empire. Consequently, previously colonized people found themselves independent but speaking English. They were not returned to pre-colonialism. They had to create a new cultural identity at peace with the unpleasantness of colonialism and new sovereignty. With the realization of this phenomenon, critics like James Nagel reread Kincaid's *Annie John* as more than a bildungsroman or coming of age story. Thus in his 1995 article, "Desperate Hopes, Desperate Lives: Depression and Self-Realization in Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* and Lucy," he builds upon Murdoch's insight. The mother becomes blended with the greater powers and the Oedipal constructs fracture beneath the pressure. The family's dynamics are now linked to the greater historical event that is Antigua.

Nagel notes the traditional bildungsroman aspects of the novel and then includes the background: "a legacy of slavery and deprivation and the rich texture of Annie's family life ... as well as the English cultural overlay on the social patterns of Antigua .. the eminence of the Anglican Church ... European Christianity ... folk rituals of potions and curses... Everything in this society has a dual foundation, even the local dialect." The novel is seen here for its complexity and applauded for its ability to express the multiplicity of Antigua through the charm of a little girl. But that is art - to show how people live in their own circumstances. Allen Vorda quotes Henry Louis Gates saying this about Kincaid: "she never feels the necessity of claiming the existence of a black world or a female susceptibility. She assumes them both. I think its a distinct departure that she's making, and I think that more and more black American writers will assume their world the way that she does. So that we can get beyond the large theme of racism and get to the deeper themes of how black people love and cry and live and die. Which, after all, is what art is all about."

Beyond the areas where Kincaid subtly breaks new ground - as in her casual blending of traditional and modern medicine through the meeting of the obeah and pharmaceutical medicines - there is the serious craft that Gates describes. Kincaid's writing is wonderful and her story captivatingly emotional because, while she is expressing a political transformation, she focuses on the human effect - the effect on the little girl.

Criticism

- In the following essay, the author examines the struggles of Annie John, Jamaica Kincaid's protagonist, to define her own character in relation to her family and culture.
- In this excerpt, Nagel asserts that Annie John is a classic bildungsroman (coming-of-age novel) in which the heroine experiences familial bliss, then ambivalent turmoil about her mother, and finally a permanent departure from home at seventeen.
- In the following excerpt, reviewer Austin compares Jamaica Kincaid's first novel, Annie John, with her collection of short stories. Austin states that Kincaid writes well-crafted, passionate accounts of a past filled with curious events.

Critical Essay #1

In the following essay, the author examines the struggles of Annie John, Jamaica Kincaid's protagonist, to define her own character in relation to her family and culture.

Critics often characterize Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* as a bildungsroman, or a coming-of-age narrative that traces the protagonist's quest for both self-knowledge and a distinct place in the world.

Such a description proves apt for Kincaid's largely autobiographical novel, since her work revolves around a series of conflicts related to her young protagonist's search for emotional stability and self-definition. Growing up worshiping her mother and living in a nurturing, almost blissful environment, Annie loses a secure sense of herself with the advent of puberty and her mother's insistence on emotional separation.

In addition to Annie's familial life, Kincaid also explores the cultural dynamics of Antigua through Annie's confrontations with the island's colonial legacy and her depictions of persistent African belief systems.

By focusing the work through Annie's eyes, Kincaid allows the reader intimate access to Annie's attempts to define herself in relation to others and to her culture. Yet despite this point of view and the lyrical, evocative style of Annie's narration, Kincaid does not romanticize Annie's conflicts or strain for reader sympathy. Instead, Kincaid insists on honestly portraying Annie's multiple reactions to her dilemmas, whether they evoke the reader's compassion or reproach. By doing so, she invites the reader to share her mam character's negotiation of her turbulent adolescence and to witness the slow, painful development of inner resources that allow her to embark on a journey into the unknown.

Throughout the novel, Annie's relationship with her mother remains at the heart of her most pressing conflicts. The older Annie who narrates the book describes her early years as Edenic, with only fleeting doubts to interfere with her intense love for her mother. In fact, basking in her mother's attention, Annie recognizes the "paradise" of her existence and pities those people who lack such love.

Soon, however, Annie becomes one of these people herself when she enters puberty. Recognizing the end of her daughter's childhood, Annie's mother forces her to move beyond their close relationship, to begin the process of becoming independent Yet Annie is not prepared for such a sudden transition and what it implies about her future. Confused over her bodily changes and in need of reassurance, she instead finds, in her eyes, betrayal.

Her most troubling and significant moment of transition comes when she unwittingly discovers her mother's sexuality. Returning early from Sunday school, Annie finds her parents making love and focuses her feelings of betrayal on her mother's hand. Horrified, Annie sees the hand as "white and bony, as if it had been left out in the elements. It seemed not to be her hand, and yet it could only be her hand, so well did I

know it. It went around and around in the same circular motion [on Annie's father's back], and I looked at it as if I would never see anything else in my life again."

For Annie, the hand that had nurtured her and was always full of life and strength now appears dead as she recognizes her exclusion from her parents' lives. She no longer resides within the comforting "circle" of her mother's hand and is figuratively expelled from her Eden.

After this time, Annie's feelings for her mother remain intense, but they are twisted toward anger, hatred, and mistrust. Annie never stops loving her mother, despite her youthful assertions to the contrary, but she cannot recover the purity of the love she felt in her early youth, and she remains ever cognizant of this loss.

Annie soon finds a partial means of filling this emotional void: friendships with girls her own age. While Annie enjoys being a leader among her peers, she saves her most intense feelings for her private relationships.

With Gwen Joseph and, later, the Red Girl, she often keeps herself apart from the other girls. Such isolation emulates, however incompletely, her childhood feelings of being a privileged extension of her mother. Her ardent friendship with Gwen, for instance, clearly functions as a substitute for Annie's lost maternal relationship. Like Annie's mother, Gwen is neat and self-controlled, and she also makes Annie the center of her world, which Annie craves. Yet, like a Lucifer who was expelled from Heaven (to whom Annie refers later in the book), Annie ultimately embraces rebellion as the means to reconcile herself to her exile from her mother's affections.

Hence her attraction toward the Red Girl, who represents the opposite of what Annie's mother values. She bathes and changes clothes only once a week, does not attend Sunday school, and plays the forbidden game of marbles. Free from rigid parental dictates and constraints, which Annie wants to be, the Red Girl becomes the embodiment of Annie's resistance to parental authority. By playing marbles with the Red Girl and then lying about it to her mother, Annie asserts an independence won through deception, which she sees as the only means open to her.

Yet Annie's open rebellions against her mother, while they help define her independence, they also highlight Annie's continuing reliance on her mother for guidance. Ironically, to assert her own break with (and hurt) her mother, she models her behavior on what she has learned from her mother. In the contest of wills over the marbles, for instance, Annie adopts negative characteristics like subterfuge and manipulation that she believes her mother uses against her.

Kincaid further portrays this element of their relationship through her use of the trunk. For Annie as a child, her mother's trunk was a symbol of familial intimacy and her own significance, since her mother would recount Annie's youth by describing the history of its contents. It also betokened strength and independence, since her mother used it when escaping her childhood home. After a caustic argument, Annie requests her own trunk, a gesture that stresses her desire to overthrow her mother's influence. What

Annie does not acknowledge, however, is her evident desire to emulate her mother. By requesting a trunk, she chooses her mother's method of rebellion against unwanted parental control and places herself on the path to independence that her mother has tread before her.

While familial conflicts are central to Annie's maturation and self-discovery, they alone do not shape her character. Kincaid also emphasizes the impact of cultural forms and attitudes on Annie, and Annie's reaction to them helps the reader understand the sense of self she is developing.

Running throughout the book are features of English influence, such as the Anglican church, English holidays, Annie's British textbooks, and even her middle name, Victoria. Annie recognizes her colonial status, but such knowledge does not lead her to feel inferior. In fact, she considers her slave heritage as a moral strength in comparison to the English colonizers, upon whose graves she and her friends daily walk.

Indeed, Annie is overtly contemptuous of the European colonizing mentality that enabled the Spanish and English to enslave others for their own aggrandizement. Contrary to her teachers, she does not revere Columbus and particularly relishes the picture of him as a captive in a ship She underscores her enjoyment at his humbling by writing " 'The Great Man Can No Longer Just Get Up and Go'" under the picture, drawing the words and sentiment from her mother's statement about her own father's debilitating illness.

Such a renunciation of colonial power parallels, in part, her attempts to reject parental authority As with her familial relationships, she chafes at the implied cultural constraints that European institutions and attitudes have placed upon her. She cannot, however, completely escape them, as revealed by her love for the British novel Jane Eyre, her writing in Old English script under Columbus's picture, and her ultimate voyage to England itself. In fact, while her insolence toward colonial symbols reflects her desire for autonomy, it also reveals her need to combat the continuing hold of the colonizer's views on her own self-definitions.

A more substantial form of resistance to European influence seems to come from the African cultural traditions still thriving in Antigua. Kincaid shows that the colonial figures in the work justify to themselves the degradation of others by privileging rationality and science over emotion and mystery.

In direct opposition to this philosophy is obeah, the West Indian descendant of African voodoo practiced by female figures in the book. Obeah involves a belief in transformation, especially of spiritual forms, and embraces the flux of the natural world rather than trying to control it. These elements of obeah prove particularly relevant to *Annie John*, since the novel addresses the inescapably of both change and the impulses of nature

Like the colonial elements of Antigua, obeah beliefs help shape Annie's life and her sense of herself. She makes no distinction, for instance, between the waking world and

the dream world, and her mother works to protect their home from outside curses and bad spirits. Annie herself, while she never outwardly embraces obeah practices like her mother and grandmother, never mocks or rejects them. Indeed, they offer her a compelling alternative to colonial belief systems and, perhaps more importantly, form a link to her maternal heritage that helps her through the darkest period in her life.

Annie's extended illness marks her most important transition in the book. The world's treacheries and corruptions seem to force her to retreat into a womb-like existence in which her perception of reality becomes warped. Kincaid accentuates the potency and mysteriousness of this illness by coupling it with a period of continuous rain, as if nature itself were in sympathy with Annie, providing her with the water for her womb environment.

Conventional medicine fails to relieve her condition, and her grandmother, Ma Chess, soon arrives, fearing that Annie has been cursed. Not bound by the strictures of Western rationality and attuned to life's emotional chords, Ma Chess immediately recognizes the true nature of Annie's distress and encourages Annie's return to virtual infancy while tending to her like a mother.

Thus, if only for a short time, Annie finally restores the undivided, nurturing existence she formerly shared with her mother and escapes the pain that has been plaguing her. These experiences seem to prepare her for the next stages in her journey, in which she will strive not to restore previous bonds, but to rend them.

Though she re-creates a sense of her former intimacy with her mother, Annie's illness does not relieve her resentment and suspicion. In fact, when she emerges from this state, she feels an even stronger separation from her family and environment and is ready to leave her home.

Her final day on Antigua reflects both her desire to escape and her remorse over another loss in her life. She contemplates her past and her home, and she measures the changes in herself by the stasis she believes she witnesses in others' lives, like her parents and Gwen.

The final lines in the book, while Annie waits to embark for England, underscore her sense of the fundamental alterations in her life and character: "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." Such imagery proves telling, for Annie, too, is "emptying out" in order to become a vessel for new experiences.

Like the vessel placed on its side, this transformation proves disorienting as well as liberating. She is frying to move beyond her past and beyond her mother's influence in order to redefine (or "refill") herself, but is unsure of what may result. She cannot see who she will become, but she can see who and what she does not want to be.

Like her language and imagery, Annie's character has grown richer and more complex throughout the book, and her journey vividly portrays Kincaid's vision of the necessary and excruciating search for self-hood that, like Annie's quest, is never complete.

Source: Darren Felty, in an essay for *Novels for Students*, Gale, 1998.
Darren Felty is a visiting instructor at the College of Charleston.

Critical Essay #2

In this excerpt, Nagel asserts that Annie John is a classic bildungsroman (coming-of-age novel) in which the heroine experiences familial bliss, then ambivalent turmoil about her mother, and finally a permanent departure from home at seventeen.

On the surface, everything about *Annie John* suggests the traditional *Bildungsroman*: it traces the central episodes in the life of a young girl from prepubescent familial bliss to her ambivalent turmoil about her mother and a permanent departure from home at seventeen. Along the way she struggles through alternate moods of embracing and rejecting her parents, the satisfying and troubling subterfuge of social expectations, the awakening of an uneasy sexuality, and the gradual formulation of an internal life that seeks release from the strictures of home and the culture of Antigua....

It is an exciting but painful journey. Essentially, it proves a tragic "coming of age in Antigua," despite the overlay of humor and charm throughout the narrative. The central issue from start to finish is Annie's relationship with her mother. The central image is that of the trunk, one that contained mementos of the mother's youth in Dominica and then comes to hold the treasured reminiscences of every stage of Annie's childhood. It is appropriate that Annie brings a similar trunk with her when she leaves Antigua at seventeen. In the matter of the trunk, as in so much else, Annie's life recalls that of her mother and brings them as close together in their separation as they were on their island. This is an awareness the adult narrator would have that the child would not. It is buttressed by the special irony that although the child Annie sees the mother as a heartless despot, the Annie who narrates portrays "no tyrant but a beautiful, loving woman who adores her only child and is wise enough to wish her daughter independent" [as Charlotte H. Bruner states in *World Literature Today* 59,1985]. The act of telling a story of rebellion with such a loving portrait of a mother is, in effect, an act of psychological reconciliation that never achieves material fulfillment. For there is no indication that Annie ever returns home. On one level, she need not, for what her story reveals is the process by which, in striving for independence, she recapitulates the life of her mother. It is no small point that both the child and the mother share the same name, "*Annie John*."

The book begins with ten-year-old Annie's childhood fascination with death, a subject with somber values set off against the sunny and carefree world of her everyday life. Her conflicts are with the world of the supernatural, with the imponderable causal forces that live in shadow and sign and that wrest a comforting meaning from random events. Her preoccupation with death is a normative fixation and an attempt to understand the most profound developments around her. Beyond the charm of innocent grotesquerie, her fixation offers the revelation of Annie's character and of a lively and creative mind. It reveals also a love for storytelling, an unsentimental confrontation with the most unpleasant realities, and a child's faulty logic that accepts folklore as transcendent reality.
In a sense Annie must reach outward for conflict. The world she lives in, at least on her level of engagement, is prelapsarian, an antediluvian feast of family love and lore. Her

mother is not so much long suffering as long rejoicing. She is so in love with her daughter and life as to celebrate even its most minute details, from routine household tasks to the bark she uses to scent Annie's bath water.

Indeed, the artifacts of the young girl's existence speak of adoration1 Her father built the house she lives in with his own hands. He even lovingly crafts the furniture in her room, the spoon she eats with, the entire household. It is a brilliant context in which to begin the story: For this caring household is the world that Annie will come to resent and rebel against in her final departure.

Although as narrator she stresses these details, at the time of the action Annie is oblivious to them She is obsessed instead with her immediate concern for a progression of expirations - from Nalda to Sonia's mother to Miss Charlotte and the humpback girl, whose passing inspires in Annie not compassion but a desire to rap on the hump to see if it is hollow. Even these episodes bring her back under the sway of her mother, however. For it is the latter who tells the stories of death in the family, and it is she who is holding Nalda in her arms when she dies. This tragedy is given cruel interpretation by Annie:

I then began to look at my mother's hands differently. They had stroked the dead girl's forehead; they had bathed and dressed her and laid her in the coffin my father had made.... For a while, though not for very long, I could not bear to have my mother caress me or touch my food or help me with my bath I especially couldn't bear the sight of her hands lying sail in her lap

It is the first negative transformation in Annie's attitude toward her mother. Annie begins to visit funeral parlors, an obsession that brings her home late one evening without the fish she was supposed to deliver. She lies about the incident: "That night, as a punishment, I ate my supper outside, alone, under the breadfruit tree, and my mother said that she would not be kissing me good night later, but when I climbed into bed she came and kissed me anyway."...

When Annie turns twelve everything changes She enters the first stages of the love-hate relationship with her mother that informs the central plot of the narrative [according to Bruner]. Ironically, it is not the terrors of death that lead to the schism but the act that brought her life: she discovers her parents making love and is revolted. To provide a context for this event, the narrator sketches a background of familial closeness, how mother and daughter would bathe together in water scented with flowers and oils. Annie tells of her mother's departure from Dominica with the trunk and of the many times the mother later removed Annie's things from it, caressing each item as an emblem of her daughter's previous growth: "As she held each thing in her hand she would tell me a story about myself." In contrast, the father's background is rich in love of a more perverse and complex variety. He has loved and abandoned a series of women, leaving several with children he does not now acknowledge. This is a fact that hangs over their lives, seeking expiation. Abandoned as a small child, he grew up with his grandmother, sleeping with her until he was eighteen, when she died. The father weeps when he

relates this story, and Annie experiences a sudden growth of sensibility in her compassion for him.

The turning point for Annie comes when her mother informs her that it is time for her to have her own clothes, not simply imitations of her mother's dresses. Annie is shocked at this demand for her discrete identity: "To say that I felt the earth swept away from under me would not be going too far." Here Annie would seem to be confronting the classic confusion of a girl in her relationship with her mother: She desires the closest possible identification and shows distress when the mother suggests any degree of separation.... Her mother exhibits disgust at Annie's many lies, but the event from which their relationship never recovers is the parental sex scene, particularly the image of her mother's hand, making a circular motion, on her husband's back. It proves an imagistic referent that lends the title 'The Circling Hand," indicating that it is the preeminent event. This image is invested with Annie's confrontation with adult sexuality, a development that will prove more difficult for her than the discovery of death. In the absence of siblings, Annie must share love with the "other" parent, a fact that inspires not rivalry toward her father but a bitter resentment of her mother: "I was sure I could never let those hands touch me again; I was sure I could never let her kiss me again. All that was finished." In her place Annie proclaims her love for a schoolmate, Gwen, and this and other surrogate loves sustain her through the break with her mother.

Annie's ambivalence toward her mother intensifies in the second chapter devoted to Annie at twelve; the implication is that the year was pivotal in her development Annie is in a new school, and much of the chapter is a description of a typical school day. Yet the salient dimensions of the episode deal with Annie's growing maturity. There is here a nostalgic look back at the unconditional love she has received throughout her childhood from her mother, as well as her compelling need to move beyond the family to the larger social world around her. The key document is an autobiographical essay she writes in school. In it she describes swimming with her mother and the profound sense of isolation and abandonment she feels when her mother momentarily slips from view. Annie is not simply puzzled or startled; she experiences a momentary crisis of being: "A huge black space then opened up in front of me and I fell inside it.... I couldn't think of anything except that my mother was no longer near me." When her mother sees her crying, she hugs her closely and promises never to leave her again, but Annie is left with the sensation of abandonment.

The depth of Annie's dependence and antipathy here adumbrates the more exaggerated passage she will make through her dark night of the soul in the penultimate chapter. Yet even now there are pathological implications to the depth of her emotion. That these events are juxtaposed with an account of her first menstruation is also important in that Annie's struggle toward emotional maturity is linked to her biological coming of age. Similarly, the intensification of Annie's love for Gwen is set against the diminution of her love for her mother, a diminution that continues until Annie reflects that "I could not understand how she could be so beautiful even though I no longer loved her."

From this point on every episode contains another expression of Annie's continuing rebellion and of her substitution of other emotional alliances for the close bond she formerly shared with her mother. Soon these ideas take the form of Annie's stealing and lying and playing marbles, all forbidden activities. There is also her infatuation with the Red Girl, who is the personification of familial anarchy in that she refuses to bathe more than once a week. Gwen, the socially correct young lady who has Annie's mother's full approval, is replaced by the Red Girl, who is free from convention and discipline: "Oh, what an angel she was, and what a heaven she lived in!" That this expression of betrayal contains portions of both pain and pleasure is expressed in Annie's relationship with the Red Girl. The latter pinches Annie and then kisses the injured spots: "Oh, the sensation was delicious - the combination of pinches and kisses." That all of this activity takes place at a time commensurate with the previous chapter becomes clear when Annie starts to menstruate, the second rendering of that event in the book. Once again it is a transitional event in that it coincides with the departure of the Red Girl and the cessation of playing marbles. But through this episode Annie has expanded the terrain of her rebellion. Embracing forbidden friends, and violating the most sacred shibboleths of social behavior, she masks her true nature behind a conventional facade This double life will come to exact its bounty....

In "Somewhere, Belgium," a title derived from an escape fantasy, Annie has turned fifteen and has entered into a deep depression, the etiology of which would seem to be an emotional schism. Many aspects of her life are warm and protective. These include the stories of her father's youth and the many objects around her crafted by his own hands, as well as the familiar story of Annie's mother leaving home at her age. But on another level Annie's already tenuous circumstances have grown worse. Promoted two grades, she is no longer in the same class with Gwen. Their relationship falters while at the same time the younger Annie suffers in the company of older girls well into adolescence. Her own hesitant steps toward courtship all end badly, even the games she plays with neighborhood boys; in each instance her mother expresses not so much outrage as disgust. When she stops on the way home to flirt with one of the boys from her youth, her mother observes the event and later accuses her of behaving like a slut. Her words move Annie to say "like mother like daughter" and the mother to respond that "until this moment, in my whole life I knew without a doubt that, without an exception, I loved you best."

Annie becomes deeply torn: she is filled with a sense of her mother's love for her, which moves her to tears; at the same time she wishes the older woman were dead. Their duplicitous relationship - outward harmony concealing a deep inner antipathy - is now an obstacle to any integration of self for Annie: "I could not be sure whether for the rest of my life I would be able to tell when it was really my mother and when it was really her shadow standing between me and the rest of the world." Annie needs desperately to be part of the rest of the world, hence the fantasy about escaping to Belgium.

These unresolved conflicts lead to Annie's dark night of the soul at fifteen, a sleep that continues throughout a long rain of more than three months. Caused by no discoverable physical illness, Annie's sleep is a mechanism to escape emotional irresolution. It is also an episode that allows for one last family summation, even the mysterious appearance

of the maternal grandmother, who comes, still dressed in black since the death of her son decades before, with ritual cures and potions. It is clear, however, that the causative factor does not lend itself to these cures nor to those of Western medicine: "I looked inside my head. A black thing was lying down there, and it shut out all my memory of the things that had happened to me." This illness resembles m many respects the archetypal pathology in the female *Bildungsroman*: "Sleep and quiescence in female narratives represent a progressive withdrawal into the symbolic landscapes of the innermost self.... Excluded from active participation in culture, the fictional heroine is thrown back on herself [according to Marianne Hirsch in The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development, 1983]. In this case, however, Annie's conflict results less from the problems of acculturation than from the more fundamental issue of growing up in her family.

Annie's illness takes her back through the progression of her life, with her parents' tender solicitations; they treat her like an infant, seeing to her every need. The complexity of her feelings toward her parents is omnipresent, as when Ma Jolie suggests that the cause of the illness may be the curses of the women Annie's father abandoned. Other familial objects also possess a negative resonance for her, as does the photograph of her in her communion dress, wearing shoes her mother had forbidden. It was another confrontation that had led Annie to wish her mother dead. Annie's need to break free of the constraints of this heritage is exemplified by her washing the images off the family photographs, except for her own portrait and that of the forbidden shoes. All of this is consistent with the theories of Nancy Chodorow, who postulates [in Reproduction of Mothering - Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender, 1978] that

mothers feel ambivalent toward their daughters, and react to their daughters' ambivalence toward them. They desire both to keep daughters close and push them into adulthood. This ambivalence in turn creates more anxiety in their daughters and provokes attempts by these daughters to break away

The illness does not abate, however, until Annie begins to realize that she never wants to see her mother again, that her world has become an "unbearable burden." As soon as she is able to articulate this awareness, she quickly recovers. It has been a transforming respite, one that leads to the resolution of the book m the last chapter.

Source: James Nagel, "Desperate Hopes, Desperate Lives Depression and Self-Realization in Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* and Lucy," in *Traditions*, Voices, and Dreams: The American Novel Since the 1960s, edited by Melvin J. Friedman and Ben Siegel, University of Delaware Press, 1995, pp. 237-53.

Critical Essay #3

In the following excerpt, reviewer Austin compares Jamaica Kincaid's first novel, Annie John, with her collection of short stories. Austin states that Kincaid writes well-crafted, passionate accounts of a past filled with curious events.

"Write what you know," says the experienced author to the younger one. Hence the critic's 10-mile bookshelf of breathless first novels about growing up normal: meager accounts, bitter, adoring, or pompous, of parents and school; death and love; television, baseball, dry or wet dreams. Jamaica Kincaid's first novel is not, thank the Muse, one of these: instead, it is one of those perfectly balanced wanderings through time which seem to spring direct from Nature. The parents and school, death and love are there, but oh, with what a difference, and 148 pages become 300 when you read a book twice. In her collection of stories, *At the Bottom of the River*, and here, in *Annie John*, Kincaid does write what she knows. What she knows is rare: pure passion, a past filled with curious events, a voice, humor, and above all a craft.

Ten-year-old *Annie John* lives in a paradise: a backyard in Antigua overseen by a benevolent goddess - her mother. "That summer, we had a pig that had just had piglets; some guinea fowl; and some ducks that laid enormous eggs that my mother said were big even for ducks. I hated to eat any food except for the enormous duck eggs, hard-boiled. I had nothing to do every day except to feed the birds and the pig in the morning and in the evening. I spoke to no one other than my parents ..." Into this Eden come twin serpents: death and separation from the mother. At first they seem innocent. From the yard, Annie observes, with curiosity, "various small, stick-like figures, some dressed in black, some dressed in white, bobbing up and down in the distance": mourners at a child's funeral. Gradually, death comes closer. One day, an acquaintance dies, a deformed girl. "On hearing that she was dead, I wished I had tapped the hump to see if it was hollow." Annie surreptitiously views the corpse and then lies about it to her mother. This is the first in a series of evasions for which she is punished.

Until now, Annie and her mother were almost one. They wore dresses cut from the same cloth; they went shopping together; they even bathed together. "Sometimes it was just a plain bath.... Other tunes, it was a special bath in which the barks and flowers of many different trees, together with all sorts of oils, were boiled in the same large cauldron ... my mother would bathe different parts of my body; then she would do the same to herself." They took these baths after her mother and an obeah woman had interpreted the world's signals: "the way a dog she knew, and a friendly dog at that, suddenly turned and bit her; how a porcelain bowl she had earned from one eternity and hoped to carry into the next suddenly slipped out of her capable hands and broke into pieces the size of grains of sand ... one of the many women my father had loved, had never married, but with whom he had had children was trying to harm my mother and me by setting bad spirits on us." Occasionally the pah-would spend a gorgeous afternoon lingering over the objects in Annie's trunk - objects redolent of a shared past which seemed to promise to continue always.

But one day the mother cuts Annie a dress of fabric different from her own; this shock precipitates a slow decline in their relationship. They still keep the appearance of unity, but it's hypocritical: their smiles are false, and mask the most intimate kinds of treachery. The full break comes when Annie reaches puberty. She is now a stranger even to herself. Everything about her, from her nose to her habit of lying, is a mostly unpleasant surprise. This alienation worsens into disease, and ultimately into a total break with Antigua.

Derek Walcott has a poem, "Love After Love," in which he prophesies to himself, and we listen in: "The time will come / when, with elation, / you will greet yourself arriving / at your own door, in your own mirror, / and each will smile at the other's welcome ..." The poem closes with a command. "Peel your own image from the mirror. / Sit. Feast on your life." Though *Annie John* replaces her mother with different objects of desire, first with the conventional schoolgirl Gwen and then with the wild Red Girl, she never does realize that both are reflections of herself, never experiences elation, except at her impending escape, and never feasts on her life - though Jamaica Kincaid does.

At the end of the book, Annie has just gone through a long illness. Having been treated by both doctors and obeah women, she rises from her sickbed several inches taller than her mother - that many inches farther from Eden. She decides to leave Antigua and become a nurse. As Annie embarks for England, the mother hugs her fiercely and declares, "in a voice that raked across my skin, 'It doesn't matter what you do or where you go, I'll always be your mother and this will always be your home.'" Annie hides her revulsion and goes to lie down in her berth, where "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."

The past always threatens to contain the future; it's impossible for the future to break free while still embraced by the past. The daughter must tell her mother, "No, I am not you; I am not what you made me," and this, whether truth or a lie, precipitates sexuality, originality, an honest relationship to personal truth. Annie is clearly an autobiographical figure, not perhaps in specific detail, but certainly in her internal development, her emotions, the tempering of her mind, the changes in her image from within the skin. How has Kincaid broken free"? How has she acknowledged her past? First novelists usually try to cope with their heritage: Kincaid has had to encompass two traditions. This has been the plaint, and the strength, of writers from the West Indies - both black, like , George Lamming, and white, like Jean Rhys. In her two books, Kincaid makes an impressive start, fusing folk tale with novel, poetry with fiction, West Indian locutions and rhythms with "European" ones. She has proven herself to be a big, exotic fish in a small, brightly colored pond - the personal in-tenor narrative. It will be interesting to see what happens once she throws herself into the ocean.

Politics, colonial history, the theme of expatriation: these would be natural extensions for Kincaid. Like an old-time cartographer, she seems to avoid some territory. "There be dragons here." In one scene, Annie defaces a picture of Christopher Columbus by scrawling an inscription m Old English-style lettering. She is caught by her prunes-and-

persimmons teacher. Her punishment? To copy out part of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The white teacher, who equates Columbus practically with God, the old English lettering, Annie's hatred of Columbus and his so-called "discovery" - all these are literary plums ripe for the plucking.

There are many ways in which Kincaid could arrange the plums in her particular literary dish. She could walk farther down her folkways or, like George Lamming m his 1953 *In the Castle of My Skin*, further relate her experience to "universal" mythic history:

"The scent of the air . filled the nostrils and the ears and the eyes so that everything smelt and looked and felt like iodine and raw fish and the liquid of the grape leaf ... Bob arched his back and we heard the syllables stumbling past his lips. 'Sea Come No Further, Sea Come No Further.' His voice went out like the squeak of an insect to meet the roar of the wave "

What the waves erase here, other than the boys' toeprints, are the imaginary footprints of King Canute.

Kincaid could also give up her Eden. *At the Bottom of the River* and *Annie John* are wonderful books, but they are, in subject, very much alike. These books epitomize elegy to a particular place and state of being, an impulse which can only sustain itself so long before it becomes redundant. For most writers, personal interior vision is not enough to precipitate a full break from the past. It is significant that the happiest moments in *Annie John* are moments of stasis:

"Soon after, I started to menstruate, and I stopped playing marbles I never saw the Red Girl again. For a reason not having to do with me, she had been sent to Anguilla to live with her grandparents and finish her schooling The night of the day I heard about it, I dreamed of her ... 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 cnes of joy turned to cries of sorrow."...

With *Annie John*, Kincaid has completed the themes begun in River. The two are companion volumes: an object lesson in showing how far a writer's technique can stretch. River seemed to be dictated straight from heart to hand, almost bypassing the mind. The voice in "Girl," for example, quoted first mother, then daughter, in a rhythm so strong it seemed to be hypnosis, aimed at magically chanting out bits of the subconscious. Now *Annie John* fills in between the bits; it gives the passions of River a rationale. The surreality, imagination, internal and external detail are still there, but they now flow in a single narrative wave.

Kincaid1 s subject matter ... is so interesting that her style, sumptuous as it is, becomes transparent. She is a consummate balancer of feeling and craft. She takes no short or

long cuts, breathes no windy pomposities she contents herself with being direct. The reader feels that even if this writer had had the bad luck to be born elsewhere, she would have made it as wonderful as "her" Antigua.

Cynthia Ozick, Mary Gordon, and Susan Son-tag have sighed over Kincaid's virtuosity with language, and they were right. Her language recalls Henri Rousseau's painting: seemingly natural, but in reality sophisticated and precise. So lush, composed, direct, odd, sharp, and brilliantly lit are Kincaid's word paintings that the reader's presuppositions are cut in two by her seemingly soft edges. Her wisdom, measured craft, and reticence will carry her on to more complicated and wider canvases, to larger geographies of the mind.

Source: Jacqueline Austin, "Up from Eden," in *Voice Literary Supplement*, Vol 34, April, 1985, pp 6-7.

Adaptations

An audio cassette was made of *Annie John* in 1994 by Airplay Inc.

Topics for Further Study

Working from the example of Annie and her mother, what is the psychological make up of the family? Is there one working model or do we all have individual relationships?

Compare how families - especially mothers - are portrayed in today's media with the novel's portrayal. Use examples of television sitcoms, cartoons, and movies for your findings.

Think about Annie's illness and the help she received from the obeah woman; does your family use any home remedies? Ask your parents what their parents did for them when they were not feeling well and compare that with how your family currently treats illness.

Research the politics of travel or photographic hunting. What, if any ethics are involved with the pursuit of recreation or game? What impact does the multi-billion-dollar tourism industry have on native peoples and the environment?

Respond to the following excerpt from Kincaid's essay, *A Small Place*: "Have you ever wondered why it is that all we seemed to have learned from you is how to corrupt our society and how to be tyrants ... ? You came."

What Do I Read Next?

A story similar to that of Annie's is Kincaid's more recent *Lucy* (1990). This novel tells the story of a young woman (17-19) as she struggles to form herself in her new life in America. Many of the themes developed in *Annie John* are further explored here. Especially evident is the affinity of the young girl with the biblical and Miltonic Lucifer, whence Kincaid took the character's name.

Written twenty-four years earlier than *Annie John, Miguel Street*, by V. S. Naipaul, is set in similar surroundings and with a similar plot. The author wrote in absentia, as did Kincaid, but his story was that of a boy growing up in the pseudo-Victorian society of Trinidad.

Derek Walcott, poet of the Caribbean and Nobel prize winner in 1992, has two collections dealing directly with the themes in Kincaid's work - writing in absentia, in America, and being estranged from home. The two works are *The Fortunate Traveler* (1981) and *MidSummer* (1984).

Annie refers to her favorite writers throughout her narration One writer referred to is Charlotte Bronte and her novel *Jane Eyre*. The comparison is revealing as Jane must also struggle to form her identity but against dead parents and an overbearing, cruel step-family. Curiously, Jane becomes the governess for Mr. Rochester's little girl whose West Indian step-mother is kept in the attic - she is insane.

Linking again with the same themes of the Caribbean and colonialism is Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). Born m Dominica, Rhys moved to Europe and took part in the writing circles of pre-WWI. She then disappeared in Cornwall to emerge with an answer to Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. Rhys writes directly back to the center of empire by explaining the circumstances of the insane woman in Rochester's attic.

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For Further Study

John Bemrose, "Growing Pains of Girlhood," *Maclean's Magazine*, Vol 98, No. 20, May 20, 1985, p. 61. In this complimentary review, Bemrose praises Kincaid's graceful style and her depiction of Anme John's resistance to the constraints of her environment.

Paula Bonnell," 'Annie' Travels to Second Childhood," *The Boston Herald*, March 31, 1985, p. 126.
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Dutton explores the connections between At the Bottom of the River and *Annie John*, seeing them as complementary texts that together develop one cohesive story.

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Taking a grand historical view, Ferguson links Kincaid's work to the struggle over gender in English literature.

Moira Ferguson, *Jamaica Kincaid: Where the Land Meets the Body*, University Press of Virginia, 1994.
Ferguson's book-length study investigates Kincaid's connections between motherhood and colonialism, the harsh tone these connections produce, and her protagonists' struggles for self-determination.

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Gaspar details the legacy of the colonial power dynamic in which Annie grows up.

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Kincaid reflects on the place where she grew up and asks Western tourists to join her. In doing so, she reveals the Antigua tourists never see□the one without hospital and library.

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Murdoch employs psychoanalytic concepts and An-tiguan cultural conflicts to illuminate *Annie John*'s rebellion against authority and her search for identity.

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Natov explores Kincaid's use of imagery, particularly associated with *Annie John*'s mother and with water, to illustrate Annie's changing relationships and perceptions.

Donna Perry, "Initiation in Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*" in *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference*, edited by Selwyn R. Cudjoe, Calaloux

Publications, 1990, pp 245-53.
Connecting Kincaid's novel with other works by women of color and Third World women, Perry relates the traditions of female storytelling, obeah, and mtergenerational blood ties to *Annie John*'s development.

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Simmons' book-length study focuses on Kincaid's treatment of loss and betrayal m her works, as well as her use of obeah (the magical power of transformation) and the rhythm and repetition in her prose.

Her chapter on *Annie John* includes a comparison to J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*.
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Kincaid explains to Snell that she feels it is her duty to bnng people down a bit from their oblivious happiness.

Helen Pyne Timothy, "Adolescent Rebellion and Gender Relations in At the Bottom of the River and *Annie John*," in *Caribbean Women Writers- Essays from the First International Conference*, edited by Selwyn R Cudjoe, Calaloux, 1990, pp. 233-42
Timothy examines the links between Caribbean cultural practices and beliefs and Kincaid's treatment of mother-daughter conflicts.

Evelyn C. White, "Growing Up Black," *The Women's Review of Books*, Vol. JJJ, No 2, November, 1985, p 11.
White praises Kincaid's ability to evoke both life m Antigua and the painful struggles of adolescence She contends that while Kincaid addresses colonialism, she foregrounds her young protagonist's internal dilemmas.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book
The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's "For Students" Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on "classic" novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

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characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

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The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel; and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years.
Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas.

From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

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events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name.
- Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch"
would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.

- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).
- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an "at-a-glance" comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
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