

## "RITE OF PASSAGE IN DIASPORA: JAMAICA KINCAID'S *LUCY* AS A POSTCOLONIAL *KÜNSTLERROMAN*"

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### **Abstract**

Jamaica Kincaid's novel *Lucy* (1990) is a coming-of-age story, or a *Künstlerroman* to be more specific in the tradition of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1917), that simply revolves around a young woman artist, who learns much from the school of life and personal experiences other than from ordinary education at academic institutions. The eponymous protagonist breaks away from such forces as colonial and patriarchal mores, which eventually contributes to her construction of her own hybrid identity and inaugurates her maturity. This struggle is established perfectly well through her apparent resistance to the constraints primarily imposed on her race and gender by both the Eurocentric society, which she has just left behind at home, and the androcentric society she encounters in diaspora. Surprisingly enough, Lucy, who is chastened towards the end of the book, creates her rite of passage towards development and independence through her valiant efforts to overcome such confines at any cost. The aim of the present article is to analyse the young artist's character formation and growth both at home and in diaspora from a postcolonial perspective. This way, it intertwines discussions of transition from innocence to experience along with such elements as androcentrism, colonial and postcolonial rebellion, and questions of identity, hybridity, diaspora and cultural displacement, which are all inextricably linked with the postcolonial discourse.

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**Keywords:** Diaspora, hybridity, *Künstlerroman*, postcolonialism, rite of passage

### **Discussion**

Since its publication in 1990, Jamaica Kincaid's novel *Lucy* is often categorised as a postcolonial narrative of exile and identity, which is written

by a former subjugated colonial woman novelist from Antigua in the eastern Caribbean about a colonial countrywoman, who has more in common with her than may have originally been thought. Nevertheless, an analytically informed reading of the text shows that it also fits into and shows strong resemblances to the *künstlerroman* category as it, as Maria Helena Lima states, is about "an artist-in-formation who creates a homeland for herself within her art" (qtd. in Majerol 17).

However, before going any further, a brief definition is given of the key term *künstlerroman*, which is anglicised henceforth through unitalicising it and converting the very opening capital letter to lower case. To put it simply, *künstlerroman* is a subgenre of the well-known *bildungsroman* or coming-of-age story in which there is always more emphasis on character formation than on any other element. The protagonist's change is inevitably important in this literary genre and its subcategories that end up with moral, psychological and social maturity, which is often achieved with difficulty towards or at the very end of the work. Etymologically speaking, *künstlerroman* is derived from the German words *künstler*, for an 'artist', and *roman*, for a 'novel'. According to Abrahams, it is an 'artist novel' that charts "the growth of a novelist or other artist from childhood into the stage of maturity that signalizes the recognition of the protagonist's artistic destiny and mastery of an artistic craft" (193). This way, this term is exclusively used in literature to refer to a work of character formation and education which is restricted to an artist or a character seeking an artistic career or vision.

Anniken Telnes Iversen, a researcher at the University of Tromsø, lists a number of common features in all *bildungsromans*, which are applicable to *Lucy* to a large extent. Chief of such are constant struggle for liberation from the people whom the protagonist depends on in childhood, their values, and their plans for their future; conflict between inner and outer worlds; false idealism that gives way to acceptance of reality; intervention of fate and chance; constant attempts to exert one's free will; tendency to social criticism; grief; learning through pain and loss; development from false self-perception to self-knowledge; and character development at the end (64). Furthermore, she goes on to quote other common features from Wilhelm Dilthey, a German philosopher and historian, who states in his book *Experience and Poetry* that *bildungsromans*

[A]ll portray a young man of their time: how he enters life in a happy state of naiveté seeking kindred souls, finds friendship and love, how he comes into conflict with the hard realities of the world, how he grows to maturity through diverse life-experiences, finds himself, and attains certainty about his purpose in the world. (22)

In addition to these features, *Lucy* can be classified as an autobiographical *künstlerroman*. As Paravisini-Gebert puts it, it is "another installment in Kincaid's autobiographical chronicle"(117)—something that is reminiscent of Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1850) and many other famous Victorian *bildungsromans* in which the author often draws heavily on their early life and experiences. Snodgrass calls it "a second semi-autobiographical novella" (172), the first being its predecessor *Annie John* (1985), since Kincaid draws heavily on her early life at her home island, though she has never stated this formally:

While none of Kincaid's fiction is formally described as autobiographical, it seems clear that her three fictional works [the other two being *Annie John* (1985) and *A Small Place* (1988)], when compared with stories Kincaid has told of herself in her journalism and interviews, are based on the personal odyssey of a girl who began life as Elaine Potter Richardson in 1949 on the tiny island of Antigua, a girl who adored her tall, beautiful, intelligent Dominican mother but who somehow lost that mother's love, a girl who left the Caribbean to work as an au pair for an American family, and who, nurtured by the anonymity and freedom of New York City in the 1970s, reinvented herself as the writer Jamaica Kincaid. (Simmons 5)

Central to Simmons's argument is that *Lucy* and Kincaid, in many respects, have much in common. They share one of their very names: the protagonist's full name is Lucy Josephine Potter and Kincaid's original name is Elaine Cynthia Potter Richardson. Also, they are born and bred in the Caribbean island of Antigua, which they leave for the United States so as to start a supposedly new and far better life. Both work first as *au pairs* for affluent American families before they break away and seek another far better life, which ends up with artistic career. In Antigua, both find much difficulty living on their own because of their domineering mothers and the tremendous impacts left behind by the British coloniser—two main obstacles that make of their independence a hard task in diaspora.

Investigating the impact of maternal figure and the daughter/mother relationship in *Lucy* is significant right here as it is closely associated with the protagonist's construction of her hybrid identity in diaspora. As early as the title character sets foot on a foreign land, the United States, she is sure enough that she "must separate herself from [her mother's overwhelming matriarchal hold] if she is to develop her own identity" (Edwards 64). With the image of the dominant mother in mind, it is difficult, if not impossible, for her to form an identity. Thus, it takes her great pains to act independently despite her mother's physical absence. No wonder the first moment she arrives in a culturally diverse society like the United States, she is adamant that she has to divest herself of her mother's apron strings, which have tied her too early in her life.

However, Lucy's relationship with her mother, Annie Potter by name, is that of contradiction: she holds her feelings of hate and love, which she cannot interpret quite easily. This is mirrored in her unresolved feelings for her white, affluent employer, Mariah, who acts as a surrogate mother. As Lucy puts it herself, "The times that I loved Mariah it was because she reminded me of my mother. The times that I did not love Mariah it was because she reminded me of my mother" (58). Similarly, this ambivalence is stressed when Lucy is reluctant enough to read the letters her mother regularly sends her, an action that reflects both her deliberate indifference to as well as longing for her mother. When she receives a letter telling her that it has not rained at home since she had left, she scathingly enough comments,

I did not care about that any longer. The object of my life now was to put as much distance between myself and the events mentioned in her letter as I could manage. For I felt that if I could put enough miles between me and the place from which that letter came, and if I could put enough events between me and the events mentioned in the letter, would I not be free to take everything just as it came and not see hundreds of years in every gesture, every word spoken, every face. (31)

Speaking of her relationship with her mother, she says that she is sure enough of her mother's love, but she is also sure that she wants her to be a mere copy of her, which Lucy vehemently resists. According to her, she prefers death to becoming an echo of anyone else:

But I already had a mother who loved me, and I had come to see her love as a burden and had come to view with horror the sense of self-satisfaction it gave my mother to hear other people to comment on her great love for me. I had come to feel that my mother's love for me was designed solely to make me into an echo of her; and I didn't know why, but *I felt that I would rather be dead than become just an echo of someone.* (emphasis added, 36).

However, the mother's influence haunts Lucy in diaspora, too. When she goes for a picnic in the forest on the Great Lake with Mariah, this brings about a recollection of a personal history of her mother when she was a little girl at school. On her way to school, her mother would go through a rain forest and cross a couple of small rivers. Once, it happened that she came across a monkey, which she saw for a number of days later. She did not like the way the monkey stared at her and, therefore, she got used to throwing stones at the monkey, which the monkey always missed smartly enough. However, one day the monkey caught a stone she had thrown and flung it back at her. Her mother was seriously injured and bled heavily. Such a bitter experience Lucy had heard about at an early age still has a tremendous

impact on her for years to come by: she does not like walking through forests where she always feels insecure. To quote her own words,

That was just one of many stories I knew about walking through places where trees live, and none of them had a happy outcome. And so as soon as we started our walk through the woods I would strike up a conversation—either with the children or, if they were not interested, with myself. Eventually I got so used to being afraid to walk through the woods that I did it by myself and began to see that there was something beautiful about it; *and I had one more thing to add to my expanding world.* (emphasis added, 55)

This incident is significant enough as it obviously shows to what extent Lucy is haunted by her mother, whose past experiences still loom on the horizon of her daughter's new, or 'expanding', world. As the analyst J. Brooks Bouson comments, "the memory-haunted" Lucy learns "just how difficult it is to escape the past" (qtd. in Snodgrass 179). When she is asked to accompany Mariah to the forest, a bitter experience elicited from the mother's record of memories shows up and embitters her new world abroad. This way, Bloom may not be mistaken when he writes, "Although Lucy's mother is physically absent from the narrative, she is powerfully evoked. Contours of her mother's life provide the protagonist with a blueprint for her existence" (81). This is also stressed by Edwards, who states that although Lucy lives away from both home and mother, the mother's hold on her is still overwhelming that the daughter finds it too difficult, if not impossible, to form an independent identity more primarily at first:

For although Lucy has escaped from the overwhelming power of her mother, the maternal figure still holds a dominant place in her mind. After leaving home, Lucy finds that her mother's power seems, at times, to grow stronger. And she even begins to view her mother as God-like and omniscient, an ever-present and all-powerful being. (63-64)

Lucy says she bears feelings of love and dislike for her white employer, since she reminds her of her mother whom she loves and dislikes altogether: "The times I loved Mariah it was because she reminded me of my mother. The times that I did not love Mariah it was because she reminded me of my mother" (58). According to Nichols, the way Mariah deals with her *au pair* conjures up the mother's domineering nature and drives Lucy into striking some sort of comparison between the two: "Mariah tries to act as Lucy's surrogate mother and mentor, compelling Lucy to draw comparisons between her relationship with Mariah and that with her own domineering mother" (189). Seeing Mariah surrounded by blooms of pink and white flowers immediately brings back the image of the mother, which gives the immediate impression that the mother's ghost will closely follow the daughter's steps wherever she goes:

I was supposed to be upstairs giving the children their baths, but seeing Mariah look so beautiful, I couldn't tear myself away. How many times had I seen my mother surrounded by plants of one kind or another, arranging them into some pattern, training them to grow a certain way; as they were the only times I can remember my mother serene, motionless, for she had the ability to appear to be moving even though she was standing still. Mariah reminded me more and more of the parts of my mother that I loved. Her hands were just like my mother's—large, with long fingers and square fingernails; their hands looked like instruments for arranging things beautifully. Sometimes, when they wished to make a point, they would hold their hands in the air, and suddenly their hands were vessels made for carrying something special; at other times their hands made you think they excelled at playing some musical instrument, though in fact the two of them were dunces at anything musical. (59)

This is the reason why Lucy looks at Mariah with much scrutiny. Mariah, mistaking this action for interest in flowers on the part of Lucy, keeps talking about the gorgeousness of flowers and the good smell they always give. Lucy says the smell given by such flowers gives her the impression that she wants to get off all her clothes and cover her body with the flowers so she can smell the delicate fragrance of roses forever. This comment drives Mariah into hysteric laughter. So, she puts the vase of flowers down and laughs. The way Mariah laughs reminds Lucy of her mother: "This was the sort of time I wished I could have had with my mother" (60).

Nevertheless, on different occasions Lucy could see that Mariah is a far better maternal figure than her mother. Her many endeavours that "aimed at creating a narrative for Lucy that moves her from foreignness to assimilation" (Majerol 21) in the American society are appreciated, though much scorned at first. Once, she insists Lucy accompany her in her picnics: "she wanted me to experience spending the night on a train and waking up to breakfast on the train as it moved through freshly plowed fields" (28). On the journey, Lucy realises to what extent she is benevolent and kind towards her. Lucy is not that surprised when she notices that people on the train are divided into two groups according to their social class: "people sitting down to eat dinner all looked like Mariah's relatives; the people waiting on them all looked like mine" (32). Although she belongs to the second group, she is surprised enough that she is treated by her white employer differently, since Mariah insists on dealing with her as if she were one of her daughters or a member of her family, not as her *au pair* who is supposed to wait on her. On a different occasion, Mariah is critical of Peggy, Lucy's Irish-American friend, and finds her a distasteful person once you get to know her a little, but she is sure enough that Lucy should have a friend: "I guess you like

Peggy a lot, and, you know, you really should have a friend" (63). In so doing, she plays the maternal figure who is not that intrusive in the life of her children. It is then that Lucy acknowledges that in such a respect Mariah is far better than her mother: "This is a way in which Mariah was superior to my mother, for my mother would never come to see that perhaps my needs were more important than her wishes" (64-65).

At the close of the novel, Lucy, the artist-in-formation, feels herself also much indebted to Mariah, since she is the one who has introduced her to art by helping her pursue her creative interests. It is she who has bought Lucy books on photography. According to Fulani, it is "Mariah [who] effectively sets Lucy on the path to explore her creative potential when she gives her a camera, for Lucy subsequently develops a keen interest in photography" (18).

Throughout the book, Lucy is seen much terrified of becoming another copy of her mother. Her matrophobia, or abnormal fear of her mother or becoming her mother, has something to do with her perception of her mother as being closely associated with both colonisation and patriarchy. For Snodgrass, she looks upon her mother as "an emblem of imitation British propriety, manners, language and self-discipline" (179). She resists her mother's domination on her because she considers her a figure standing for a colonial subject, who accepts without the least grumble the dictates of the British coloniser and succumbs to British mores. According to Paravisini-Gebert,

Her resistance is focused primarily on her mother, because she symbolizes all limitations Lucy has fought against. Her mother becomes a foil to Lucy because, having lived her life within the confines of what tradition and colonial mores demanded, she takes for granted that her daughter would accept those limitations, too. (139).

This way, her mother could be interpreted as a symbol of the submissive homeland that accepts, if not welcomes, the dictates of the coloniser instead of resisting them. Thus, her constant efforts to make her daughter abide by the norms of her Eurocentric society could be interpreted in symbolic terms as the attempts taken by the subjugated Caribbean society to force the new generation to obey the confines imposed by the coloniser instead of defying them.

Like Kincaid, who views her mother as "an instrument of patriarchy, a phallic mother" (Bloom 79), Lucy associates her mother with the androcentric society: "the mother becomes an embodiment of patriarchal mores" (Bloom 81). Her mother's increasing insistence that her daughter stick to the regulations, if not constraints, of the Antiguan society, especially those regarding women and their rights, disappoints Lucy to the core. Furthermore, it reduces the mother to a subservient representative of a

patriarchal society. In her book *Caribbean Women Writers: Identity and Gender*, Emilia Ippolito contends that the society which Lucy has left behind is male-dominated that marginalises and commodifies women:

In Antigua and elsewhere in the West Indies, there was an accentuated violence directed toward women based on popular attitudes toward their sexuality and their bodies. These attitudes were a combination of Victorian ideology and regressive religious views spread through the educational system, sometimes even adopted by the women who were denigrated by these ideologies. (qtd. in Röpke 15)

Keeping this into consideration, no wonder Lucy, whose very name is derived from *Lucifer* himself, shares some of the Devil's characteristics, more specifically his rebellion against God. Her mother's words to her, "I named you after Satan himself. Lucy, short for Lucifer. What a botheration from the moment you were conceived" (152), still echo in her—something that helps accelerate her compelling drive into acting rebelliously against her mother and all those resembling her. First, she is seen reluctant enough to write back to her mother. Afterwards, she decides to ignore all her letters, which she keeps unread. Even when she gets a letter with the word 'URGENT' on it, she keeps it unopened:

One day a letter arrived for me, and written all over the envelope in my mother's beautiful handwriting was the word URGENT. To me the letter might as well have had written all over it the words "Do not open until doomsday," because I added it to all the unopened letters I had received from home. (115)

Furthermore, she goes further and burns the letters down in order not to yearn for her mother or the people whom she has left behind. As her words attest, "I knew that if I read only one, I would die from longing for her" (91). Likewise, in defiance of her mother, she befriends Peggy, a girl of easy virtue who "introduces Lucy to the pursuit most dreaded by Lucy's mother—sex for the fun of it, or, as the mother would put it, "sluttishness"" (Simmons 131). Also, she gets enmeshed in causal sexual relationships with many sexual partners. Her determination not to keep in touch with her mother and her resolve to defy her wishes, indeed, symbolises her steadfastness not to succumb to colonisation and patriarchy. Thus, her defiance of her mother may be interpreted symbolically as resistance to both the coloniser and the male-dominated society, where she is destined to live at home and in diaspora. Likewise, this confrontation truly marks the start of her rite of passage from a subjugated girl to a mature and independent woman having her own say over her life and future.

Even her migration can be interpreted in symbolic terms as rebellious enough: Lucy decides to serve and toil in the US than enjoy her life in Antigua, which is reminiscent of Milton's Satan who rebelliously enough

finds it "Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n" (*Paradise Lost* 1.263). Braziel writes,

Kincaid accomplishes something very similar to Dante, I contend, in the novel *Lucy*: Antigua is tropical and hot, yet her mother is fiery, blazing, godlike; and in New York is cold, icy, dreary; yet like Lucifer in *Paradise Lost*, she gets to diabolically reign in hell, which is better than to serve in heaven, as Milton's Lucifer proudly proclaims. (93).

Similarly, though Mariah is "kind, generous and well-disposed toward Lucy, whom she treats as her protégé rather than as a servant" (Bloom 80), Lucy is adamant enough to play the rebel with her. Many a time, she acknowledges her gratitude towards Mariah: "This woman who hardly knew me loved me" (30); "Mariah was the kindest person I had ever known" (72). Afterwards, she goes further to add,

Mariah was like a mother to me, a good mother. If she went to a store to buy herself new things, she thought of me and would bring me something also. Sometimes she paid me more money than it had been agreed I would earn...Always, she expressed concern for my well-being. I realized again and again how lucky I was to have met her and to work for her and not, for instance, some of her friends. (110)

Nevertheless, before her first year in the United States goes by she leaves work at Mariah's house as the latter "unwittingly recalls both the mother and...the totalizing values of the "motherland" whose values Lucy must evade" (Bloom 80). For Snodgrass, "[Lucy's]disaffection for mother figures is so strong that she alienates herself from Mariah, her employer, who attempts to ease the *au pair* into the household, community, a temperate climate, and Western feminism" (132). Similarly, she mistakes Mariah's helpfulness as intrusion into her life. For her, Mariah is simply "the representative of narcissistic power against whom Lucy must fight if she is to forge a separate identity" (Simmons 129). Her feelings of reservation, and sometimes hate, towards her white employer is attributed to Mariah's being an emblem of Western dominance, which conjures up the practices of the British coloniser in her Eurocentric society. According to Bloom,

Lucy's relationship with her employer is often marred because of ideological, cultural and class divisions and because of the heroine's unresolved relationship with her mother. She dismisses Mariah with condescending scorn, not only for her lack of awareness of social and racial inequalities but also for her employer's attempt to intellectualize and universalize women's experiences in a homogenous paradigm. At the same time, however, Lucy remains inexorably drawn to Mariah, in part due to the woman's many acts of generosity and kindness extended to her employee. (79)

This is the very reason why she evades well-meaning Mariah and seeks another work that, she wishes, would be a "step toward her own healthy independence" (Simmons 30), or a real movement that would reinforce her self-discovery and realisation. The now twenty-year-old Lucy unbelievably manages in one single year to reach long-awaited self-realisation and independence: she immerses herself deeply in art which she takes as her life.

Surprisingly enough, Lucy, the Lucifer-like rebel, meets the same end of Satan, the outcast: she leaves the Caribbean Antigua with its warmth and charm for another place of pale chill and greyness, where she leads an exotic life as an alien or outsider. As Simmons puts it,

Lucy—named, her mother has told her, for Lucifer—has been expelled from both the Caribbean and her mother's life. Warm, vivid Antigua has been replaced by Lucy's wealthy employer, the affectionate but sheltered and naïve Mariah, who proffers books on feminism to help Lucy over her deep sense of loss and despair. (3)

Migration is significant enough again as it marks the protagonist's transition from innocence into experience. For Snodgrass, it is "a serious reshaping of [her] heart and mind" (179). In a big American city, which is more likely New York, Lucy works as a nanny for a white family made up of six members—a husband and wife and their four children. At first, the family members seem happy, which gives the immediate impression that "the husband and wife looked alike and their four children looked just like them. In photographs of themselves, which they placed all over the house, their six yellow-haired heads of various sizes were bunched as if they were a bouquet of flowers tied together by an unseen string" (12). Mariah tells her once "I love you" (26). Lucy is sure of this love, and ascribes it to her help of Mariah: "I believed her, for if anyone could love a young woman who had come from halfway around the world to help her take care of her children, it was Mariah" (27).

Lucy learns much from Mariah. Everything about affluent employer impresses her, whom she once describes as "blessed" (27). In Mariah, she finds the good friend. In the spring, Mariah is careful enough to take her impoverished employee with her family members to spend a nice time on one of the marvelously beautiful shores of the Great Lakes. Once, Mariah blindfolds Lucy with a handkerchief, and holding her by the hand, walks her to a beautiful thick-flowered spot, the like of which she has never seen before. It turns out that the flowers she has seen are daffodils: "These are daffodils...I'm hoping you'll find them lovely all the same" (29). For Snodgrass, "Mariah's maternal gestures and introduction of Lucy to North American life imply a need for Lucy to echo her preferences and to embrace daffodils as the true herald of spring" (180). She is kind towards her *au pair*

that she wants to assimilate her in her society, but her problem is that she is under the illusion that all those people close to her love the same things she does. She loves the daffodils, but she is ignorant of their implications to her protégé. Therefore, she assumes erroneously that they denote beauty and love for Lucy, too. Whereas daffodils denote the advent of spring and such things as beauty and glamour of nature, they may signify entirely different things for people of different cultures. They have negative connotations for Lucy, who is from a foreign land and diverse culture: they bring about feelings of "sorrow and bitterness" (30) from the deep past as they are closely associated with the British colonisation of her home island. More importantly, they are an emblem of the colonial education that was imposed by the white coloniser on the natives in the Caribbean. What angers and embitters Lucy the most about the daffodil talk is her recollection of a bitter experience from her personal history, when the ten-year-old schoolgirl Lucy was asked to learn by heart an English poem about daffodils, presumably Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud", and recite it in front of parents, teachers and fellow pupils at the school auditorium. Lucy did the task assigned to her perfectly well and, to her amazement, if not dismay, all the attendants stood up and a storm of loud applause then ensued. Little Lucy was sick of the experience and the poem as well, but, out of decorum, she had to wear what she stigmatises as "two-facedness" to please the attendants:

After I was done, everybody stood up and applauded with an enthusiasm that surprised me, and later they told me how nicely I had pronounced every word, how I had placed just the right amount of special emphasis in places where that was needed, and how proud the poet, now long dead, would have been to hear his words ringing out of my mouth. I was then at the height of my two-facedness: that is, outside I seemed one way, inside I was another; outside false, inside true. And so I made pleasant little noises that showed both modesty and appreciation, but inside I was making a vow to erase from my mind, line by line, every word of that poem. (18)

The night after the party, Lucy had a nightmarish dream in which she was chased down a narrow cobbled street by bunches of those same daffodils that she had vowed to forget. In the dream, she fell down out of exhaustion and was buried by the pile of daffodils that stood over her in an attempt to suffocate her. This bitter experience seemed to chase her for long year afterwards.

Lucy's determination to erase from her memory any trace of Wordsworth's poem shows her rebellion against the British hegemony in Antigua as well as her rejection of the practices imposed on her by the white world in diaspora, primarily on the basis of her race and gender. According to Gregg, "English Romanticism's fantasy of the individual consciousness in

tune with nature is penetrated by a deep, unacknowledged imperialist violence in which nature and natives are contained, commodified, distanced, that is, made into objects by this discourse" (41). Also Moira Ferguson in her book *Jamaica Kincaid: Where the Land Meets the Body* states, this poem is "emblematic of a colonial system that imposed its own values and cultural standards through a system of education that fell outside local control" (qtd. in Röpke 7).

To convince Miriam, the youngest daughter of Mariah, to eat her stewed plum and yoghurt, Lucy tells her fairytales about the privileges given to the children who eat their food. However, she says this in a low voice so that Mariah cannot overhear what she says, since such a way of bringing up children is regarded as inappropriate by Mariah:

Mariah did not believe in this way of doing things. She thought that with children sincerity and straightforwardness, the truth as unvarnished as possible, was the best way. She thought the fairy tales were a bad idea, especially ones involving princesses who were awakened from long sleeps upon being kissed by a prince; apparently stories like that would give the children, all girls, the wrong idea about what to expect in the world when they grew up. (45)

Mariah's argument about the inappropriateness of such a way of teaching children immediately conjures up Lucy's experience with her mother at home, who used to teach her this way. She goes further to claim that her mother's way of teaching or upbringing could be held responsible for a great deal of the misconceptions she now holds about the world around her. The lessons she has learnt from her mother's fairytales imbue her mind with certain expectations, which turn out to be false later on. As she puts it herself, "Her [Mariah's] speech on fairy tales always amused me, because I had in my head a long list of things that contributed to wrong expectations in the world, and somehow fairy tales did not make an appearance on it" (45).

Lucy's constant and persistent search for identity in diaspora in a world incompatible with the world she has left behind, a world that is not ready at first to accept or welcome her as a member in it, is in symbolic terms a search for independence. As stated earlier, constructing identity at home for Lucy is tantamount to an impossibility because of the overwhelming presence of the dominant mother and the subservience left behind by the British coloniser—something that drives Lucy into seeking her freedom abroad. In his book *Postcolonial Perspective on Women Writers: From Africa, the Caribbean, and the U.S.*, Martin Japtok quotes Kincaid in an interview as asserting that her characters' search for identity is a search for autonomy: "This search my characters undertake is not a search for identity but a search for autonomy, personal autonomy" (qtd. in Röpke 8). Therefore, Lucy looks for a way out through which she can accomplish this long-

awaited wish, which she does find in migration. However, it is not that easy for her to form an identity in diaspora, especially in such a big country like the United States. On her first days there, Lucy feels herself marginalised and leads the life of exile and alienation, which she surprisingly enough prefers to life under the custody of her domineering, overbearing mother: "Lucy has sought to escape the strictures of life in Antigua. But she does not find an immediate sense of release or freedom in the United States. Rather she experiences a bewildering sense of alienation" (Edwards 61).

It is surprising enough that the novel starts with the very opening chapter, entitled "Poor Visitor", and ends in the fifth chapter, entitled "Lucy", which implies the protagonist's character formation and personal independence. In the very opening part, Lewis, Mariah's husband, sympathetically enough looks at Lucy at a dinner conversation and calls her "poor Visitor, poor Visitor" (14). To some extent, this is true to Lucy, the then poor maid from an impoverished Third World island state in the Caribbean, and one who has left for a foreign land to support her poor family financially. Aware of this fact, Lucy asserts that she has been 'shipped' as cargo to the United States to back her family, a bitter experience that recalls the shipment of the blacks as slaves to the New World. Speaking of her small room close to the kitchen at her white, affluent employers' house, Lucy describes it as "a box in which cargo traveling a long way should be shipped. But I was not a cargo. I was only an unhappy young woman living in a maid's room" (7).

Furthermore, the word 'visitor' itself denotes transience: working as an *au pair* is just transient in Lucy's journey towards autonomy and self-fulfilment. This is stressed by Lucy herself who says, "It was at dinner one night not long after I began to live with them that they [i.e., Mariah and Lewis] began to call me the Visitor...as if I were just passing through, just saying one long Hallo, and soon would be saying quick Goodbye!"(13). However, towards the end of the novel the protagonist is no longer known as the 'poor Visitor'; rather, she is now the chastened and independent "Lucy", the very subtitle of the last part. Change from "Poor Visitor" to "Lucy" does suggest the protagonist's growth. It is surprising enough that by the end of the book, "Lucy is getting on her feet in the new world. She is no longer awed or threatened by the apparent perfection of lives in the white Western world. And the simple fact of having survived for a time on her own, away from her mother, is empowering" (Simmons 130). She takes steps towards developing herself as early as the very beginning of the last part, whose first opening paragraph runs, "It was January again; the world was thin and pale and cold again; *I was making a new beginning again*" (emphasis added, 133)

For any polished analyst of this novel, it is that "new beginning" that inspires Lucy into forming a hybrid identity along with developing her

artistry, which takes the form of photography later on as the novel progresses. Fulani is of the view that,

A new sense of emotional liberation, and a little money of her own, empowers Lucy to pursue her creative interests. She enrolls in a photography class at night school, and one of her first photographs is of a group of objects that emblemize her rebellion against Caribbean notions of female shame and the norms and standards of Caribbean femininity that her mother so staunchly upheld. (17)

Central to Fulani's argument is that the title character has pursued art, photography in this case, as a career in defiance of her mother's wish, who wants her to be a nurse. This time, she rebels against her mother by dropping the nursing classes and taking photography classes at a nearby university. This way, her photographs can be interpreted as a form of protest against her mother: "a symbolic statement of Lucy's rejection of the colonizing gender norms embodied by her mother" (Fulani 18). Likewise, she enjoys taking photographs and finds much solace in doing this thing. To quote her own words,

I had continued to take photographs, but I had no idea why. I even put aside a small amount of the money I earned so that I could take a course at night at a nearby university, but it was not with any ideas about my life in mind—it was only that I enjoyed doing this. (160)

A point to be stressed right here is that Lucy's artistic ability is not established late in the book as some may erroneously assume; rather, it is mentioned too early through her perception of the dark and light on her first day in the United States, where she associates mundane colours like 'gray' and 'black' with the new environment in which she is destined to live:

It was my first day. I had come the night before, a gray-black and cold night before—as it was expected to be in the middle of January, though I didn't know at the time—and I could not see anything clearly on the way in from the airport, even though there were lights everywhere" (3).

Afterwards, she goes further to say that as early as she has set foot in diaspora she is disillusioned enough and suffers from pangs of homesickness. When she first decides to live abroad in a foreign land, it has never struck her that she will have such pangs of nostalgic feelings for her birthplace or the natives she has left behind. As she claims, the image abroad is that dimmer than that at home. To quote her very words,

In books I had read—from time to time, when the plot called for it—someone would suffer from homesickness. A person would leave a not very nice situation and go somewhere else, somewhere a lot better, and then long to go back where it was not very nice. How impatient I would become with such a person, for I would feel I was in a not very nice situation myself, and how I wanted to go somewhere else. But now I, too, felt that I wanted to be

back where I came from. I understood it, I knew where I stood there. If I had had to draw a picture of my future then, it would have been a larger gray patch surrounded by black, blacker, blackest. (6)

On the other hand, cheerful colours like 'pink' and 'green' are inextricably linked with her homeland, which make it an emblem of both beauty and splendour:

In the past, the thought of being in my present situation had been a comfort, but now I did not even have this to look forward to, and so I lay down on my bed and dreamt I was eating a bowl of pink mullet and green figs cooked in coconut milk, and it had been cooked by my grandmother, which was why the taste of it pleased me so, for she was the person I liked best in all the world and those were the things I liked best to eat also. (6-7)

Lucy's artistic career empowers her position in her new environment, which has once marginalised her because of her race and gender. Furthermore, it makes her integrate quite easily into society—something that helps her later on form her new hybrid identity: Antiguan and American. As mentioned earlier, the protagonist's feelings towards home are "very ambivalent", a composite of "love and rejection" (Röpke 16). She has left her home island with its constraints and problems for a foreign land where she seeks independence and the construction of an identity. However, she resists the confines of the homeland and rejects her being subsumed in the new environment, ending up with a hybrid culture amalgamating the heterogeneities of both in one single entity. This way, in her constant and persistent search for identity, Lucy realises that she cannot stick to one culture to the exclusion of the other. This realisation marks her maturity or development. Röpke notes,

Lucy is a hybrid since she is deeply influenced by her Caribbean culture although she rejects a lot of its values. She has been educated through the British educational system, which was imposed on Antigua as well as on the British colonies but she despises her British colonizers and struggles against becoming a reflection of them. She is attracted by the U.S. and although she rejects American values, she is starting to lead a western life. In the end she is caught in transition but she is not lost. She incorporates two or even three different cultures, Caribbean, English and American. Her own identity will develop as a mixture of those different cultures. (13)

Likewise, Lucy's attachment to her homeland is well illustrated at the end of the novel when she buys curtains for the windows of the flat she shares with Peggy. The curtains are made from calico with colourful flowers drawn on them—something she is used to in the Caribbean, but is considered vulgar in the United States:

The curtains at my windows had loud, showy flowers printed on them; I had chosen this pattern over a calico that the lady in the cloth store

had recommended. It did look vulgar in this climate, but it would have been just right in the climate I came from. Through the curtains I could see that the day was just like the one before: gray, the sky shut up tight, the sun locked out. I knew then that even though I would always notice the absence or presence of the sun, even though I would always prefer a sunny day to a day without sun, I would get used to it; I wouldn't make an important decision based on the weather. (144-145)

As illustrated above, she has left a land where the sun always rises for another where the sun is not always present. However, she has adapted herself to this sort of life. This way, the absence and presence of the sun could be used in symbolic terms to signify Lucy's adjustment to her hybrid culture. It has taken Lucy great pains to reach this stage. In her first morning in the United States, she is a little bit surprised by the "pale-yellow sun" contrary to the "bright sun-yellow sun" at home:

That morning, the morning of my first day, the morning that followed my first night, was a sunny morning. It was not the sort of bright sun-yellow making everything curl at the edges, almost in fright, that I was used to, but a pale-yellow sun, as if the sun had grown weak from trying too hard to shine. (5)

According to Nichols, as Lucy's confidence of her art grows in times, it drives her into abandoning all her old relationships (190). It seems that the protagonist has got rid of all her relationships, including her mother, Mariah, Peggy, Paul and many others, simply because she does not want anyone to possess her or to thwart her way. In an interview with Allan Vorda, Kincaid is quoted as saying about her protagonist that she has a certain character that does not permit her to let anyone possess her:

What Lucy doesn't want is to be possessed again. She has just escaped a certain possession from her mother and she doesn't want to be possessed again. I think at the end of the book she wishes she could be possessed and loved, but she can't at this point in her life. (25)

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